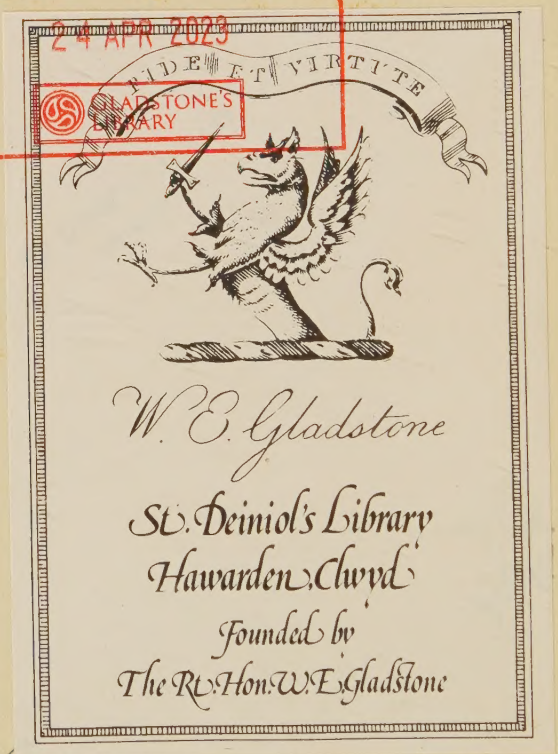
Cancelled from
Gladstone's Library
24 APR 2023
GLADSTONE'S
LIBRARY



ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN.

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_KU-359-415

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN

A Biblical Thoroughfare

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN.

A
Biblical Thoroughfare

or

An Endeavour to share the Main Results of Biblical Scholarship with the General Public

BY

NEVILLE STUART TALBOT, M.C., D.D.

BISHOP OF PRETORIA

SOMETIME FELLOW AND TUTOR OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD; AND ASSISTANT CHAPLAIN GENERAL. AUTHOR OF "THE MIND OF THE DISCIPLES," "THOUGHTS ON RELIGION AT THE FRONT," "THE RETURNING TIDE OF FAITH," ETC.

Cancelled from
Gladstone's Library
24 APR 2023
GLADSTONE'S LIBRARY

LONDON
STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT
32 RUSSELL SQUARE, W.C. I
1929

35614

First published . . *September* 1928
Second Edition . . *February* 1929

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY,
HAWARDEN.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

TO

CECIL MARY

EVER LONGED-FOR AND BELOVED

Question.—Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as given of God to convey to us in many parts and in divers manners the revelation of himself which is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ?

Answer.—I do.

The Ordering of Deacons according to the Revised Book of Common Prayer

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I THINK that I may thankfully conclude, from the reviews of this book, that it has not altogether failed in its object of being a guide to enable the "average" and perplexed man to find his way again through the Bible. That being so, I venture, on the occasion of a second edition, to lay stress on the fact that the book does not pretend to be a commentary on the whole Bible. It aims at marking out a main road for travellers to follow. It resembles a road (or route) map, as used by motorists, which in no way covers the whole areas traversed by high roads, but rather gives the information necessary for arriving at important places, while indicating the direction and distance of places off the main track. In the nature of the case a great deal has to be left out.

From this point of view I would comment on some criticisms of my treatment of both the Old and the New Testaments.

As regards the Old Testament it has been objected that, in making the prophets the door into it, I have laid too much emphasis on the dates of the prophetic literature (which includes much of the earlier history), and too little on the historical course of events which the literature

describes. "The Bible contains important contributions to the history of our religion during many centuries prior to Amos," says a reviewer.

To this I reply that the point is to reach the main positions; to climb, so to say, the chief heights. From them, once attained, the lie of the rest of the country can be seized. It is precisely because many people have not known nor done this that they are in such confusion about the Old Testament. They have "begun at the (supposed) beginning" with Adam and Eve and Noah, and have passed on to Moses and the Exodus, and then to the Judges and the Kings of Israel and Judah. In so doing they have not seldom got lost or weary and have not arrived anywhere. I plead that what they ought to do is to begin at the other end, to get a grip of the quite indubitably historical period of the great prophets, and to work back from them to the earlier times. I have no sort of doubt that, if they move in this way, they will find real history running back a very long distance, most probably to Abraham, quite certainly to Moses. At the same time holding an impregnable position on, so to say, the prophetic heights, they can afford to be free from anxiety as to the precise historical value of the accounts of distant events. They may rest assured, for instance, that something tremendous and epoch-making happened at Sinai, without claiming that it is possible to know exactly what actually did happen.

As regards the New Testament, objections have

been raised to my making the implications of the early Epistles the door into it, and to my contention that the Gospel narratives are to be read in the light of the Church's creed underlying the Acts and the Epistles. This way in, it is thought, is too difficult for the unlearned. They had better begin with the Gospel story.

The issue raised is most vital and important. At the risk of repeating what I have said in Chapters VI and VII of the Second Part, I will say two things.

First, to begin with the believing Church—with the Risen and Ascended Christ, present and in action within it in the Spirit—is the historical beginning of Christianity. Till St Peter could say, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ with the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii. 38), the Gospel was never fully in anyone's possession. It was never possessed by the disciples during the ministry. For in the days leading up to the Cross all turned on that which was still to arrive. The Gospel narratives (the Synoptic ones) therefore do not contain the Gospel; they lead up to it. They tell of the days prior and preparatory to the great act of the Father when He "raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory," without which both Jesus and His Gospel were never fully intelligible. They therefore only disclose their full meaning in the light of that which they do not contain. We have therefore to begin, where

the first converts began, with Christ " at the right hand of God exalted," yet present and in sacramental operation in His Church. And that, after all, is where most people do begin. It is the living Christ who confronts each succeeding generation of men, even though many have not been converted to Him nor have accepted Him. It is the Church's creed to which people in greater or lesser degree give assent : it is into the Church of Christ that they have been baptized.

Doubtless every one—like the first converts—has to be told about Jesus Christ, who He is, what He taught, how He lived, how He came to die. And that is where the Gospel narratives come in. They give the picture of Him in whose Name those who receive Him are baptized. They go back to " all that Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day in which he was received up " (Acts i. 1-2)—to the beginning which only has full meaning in the light of the end, namely, the outpouring of the Spirit by Jesus at the right hand of God.

I urge this way of reading the New Testament with all my might. I do so for the sake of the unlearned. For it will save them from the futility, wrongheadness and confusion of much modern scholarship. For in the latter (and especially among Liberal Protestants) there has been present an aversion from the Church and the Sacraments, a discomfort over miracle, a prejudice against theology and doctrine, and an attitude of suspicion towards St Paul. Hence a leaving on one side of

Gospel of God in Christ and in the Spirit—the only Gospel which ever existed—and a going back to the human Jesus, with the desire to begin and, if possible, to end there. If the "average man" takes that road he will most probably arrive nowhere. We may be sure of that, just because so many learned men have taken that road and have arrived nowhere.

Yet, in the second place, this right way of reading the Gospel narratives in the light of the Gospel of the glorified Christ, does not mean that we should throw away the most precious result of modern New Testament study, namely, the reapprehension of the real and historical personality of Jesus of Nazareth. We need not go back to the old conventional way of looking at Jesus all the time through doctrinal spectacles. For the narratives allow us to go back to "see Jesus" as His followers saw Him, in the days when it was not fully disclosed who He was, but when He was at anyrate their beloved Man and Master and Brother. The narratives need not be read all the time doctrinally just because they tell, with most wonderful faithfulness, of the experience of the disciples in the days before the doctrine—that is, the truth of God in Christ—was in their minds.

Thus the way of reading the New Testament, which I urge in this book, will both help towards the repossession of the souls of men by the Gospel of God, and also keep that Gospel ever vivified by its Centre and Original—the real and actual Jesus

Christ. It will enjoy the best of two worlds, both the ancient and the modern.

It is, of course, only a main way. But it is the right way. It leaves much with but barely indicated. It leaves, I acknowledge, St Paul with little justice done to him. Yet it shows sufficiently where he comes in. After all, it is not possible in one book to do everything at once.

Lastly, some readers of the book have expressed the doubt whether those who are quite or almost unversed in reading the Bible will be able "to extricate from the earlier Epistles the creed of the Christian Church" (p. 206). Well, I have tried to do it for them. I believe that any reader of willing intelligence can realise this, if he will carefully absorb the contents of Chapter I, Part II.

NEVILLE, PRETOR:

PRETORIA, *December* 1928.

CONTENTS

PART I

THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAP.		PAGE
	Preface to the Second Edition	1
	Introduction	9
I.	The Task and the way to go about it	13
II.	If One Chosen People, what of all the Rest?	23
III.	Natural Religion and the Religion of Israel	30
IV.	The Geographical Position of the Jew	39
V.	Prophecy	47
VI.	Amos	54
VII.	The Tempering of Faith in the Furnace of History	60
VIII.	Deuteronomy	66
IX.	The Decline and Fall of the Jewish Monarchy	74
X.	Jeremiah	83
XI.	The Exile	94
XII.	Ezekiel	102
XIII.	The Outcome of the Exile	113
XIV.	The Second Isaiah	123
XV.	After the Exile	133

CHAP. PAGE

XVI. The Rebuilding of Jerusalem . . 143
XVII. Genesis and the Pentateuch . . 152
XVIII. The Entrance of the Modern World . 160
XIX. Religious Thought after the Exile . 169
XX. The Psalms 179
XXI. Apocalyptic 189
A Word in Summary 198

PART II

THE NEW TESTAMENT

I. The Door into the New Testament . 201
II. The Synoptic Gospels 210
III. St Mark 219
IV. The Marcan Drama 227
V. The Marcan Drama—*continued* . . 236
VI. The Meaning of the Drama . . 244
VII. The Gospel Narrative and the Incarnation 252
VIII. The Acts 262
IX. The Expansion of the Gospel . . 273
X. The Epistle to the Hebrews . . 284
XI. The First Epistle of St Peter . . 294
XII. The Fourth Gospel 305
XIII. The Fourth Gospel—*continued* . . 314
XIV. The Fourth Gospel—*continued* . . 328
XV. The Book of Revelation . . . 339

A Biblical Thoroughfare

INTRODUCTION

I do not think it is too much to say that the future of Christianity is bound up with a right understanding of the Bible. All the different Christian communities have had this in common, that they made an appeal to Scripture. The appeal might vary in character and emphasis, but nevertheless it was universal. This appeal was, until recent times, bound up with a simple-minded acceptance of the Bible as a whole : it was linked, historically, with the doctrine of verbal inspiration. But last century saw the radical disturbance of this element of appeal to Scripture, which has been common to all Christendom. For it saw the irruption into the world of received tradition of streams of new knowledge. The result has been the bending of scholars to the task of relating the new information, about life on this planet, to the truth of the Bible. Acceptance of the Bible has been replaced by the endeavour to understand it " critically " and historically. The endeavour has yielded great results. Strong, positive and constructive conclusions have been attained. The truth of the Bible has survived

examination. Only it is not truth, so to say, " en bloc," but truth separated into its component elements, in such a way that they are appreciated as being of different value and importance. Roughly speaking, therefore, scholarly men can read the Bible with minds open to the claims of historical science ; can hold all the more firmly to the truth of the Bible because it survives examination : can re-establish the appeal to the Bible as integral to Christian life and doctrine : can verify again the amazing riches of Scriptural, above all of New Testament, experience.

So much for the scholars. Meanwhile the average man has not fared so well. The scholar's task of a discriminating understanding or unravelling of the Bible is commonly beyond his powers. He lacks the time and the capacity for it. At the same time he has come vaguely to feel that the Bible has lost prestige ; that it is " blown upon " ; that he cannot use it as his pious ancestors used it. So he has commonly given up reading the Bible. It has become to him almost a closed book. Yet, meanwhile, he is often vaguely familiar with the Bible. He has heard it read ; he has had divinity lessons at school and instruction at Sunday School. But this has meant, in many cases, the congestion of his mind by undigested Scriptural information. This state of things was forced upon the attention of " padres " during the War. A naval chaplain's (now a Bishop) experience of finding that midshipmen in the Navy knew little or nothing about

Christianity, and yet were eager to solace his disappointment at their ignorance by telling him that they knew the dimensions of the Tabernacle in the wilderness—that story is quite representative. I myself remember a young major in the Army Service Corps dilating upon the fact that he had won the Divinity Prize at his public school. "Padre," he said, "I could tell you all sorts of things . . . all about the Ark, and the walls of Jericho, and the cubits of the Temple, and the lists of the kings of Israel and Judah . . . but (with a real note of passion in his voice) what the very —— it all means I don't know."

Hence the need of bridge-builders. The gap between understanding scholars and muddled men in the street cries out to be bridged. Not without a sense of daring I have produced this book as an attempt to build such a bridge. That it is an ambitious endeavour I do not deny. To act as a guide through the Bible—to point out a Biblical thoroughfare—means covering a great deal of ground. It means steering a difficult course between pit-falls. It means treating great questions summarily and so forth. I can imagine that some will find this book too learned and detailed, while others will vote it too simple and sketchy. It may well be despised by the learned and neglected by the unlearned. Frankly, I do not know whether it achieves its object of being the bridge required. But the need of a bridge remains. It is urgent. I cannot call to mind a book which effectively does what this book aims at doing. So—in the

mysterious idiom of the private soldier—I am "chancing my arm." I am taking the risk of offering this book to the public. I have had in mind in writing it the technically unlearned layman, who wants to understand the Bible and is willing to take pains to do so. I hope that the book may fulfil its title for his benefit. I hope, that is, that it will give him a main way through the Bible, will show him where to begin and how to go forward, what points to neglect, and at what points to pay attention and so forth. I hope that it may give him the general "hang" of the Bible as a whole, and enable him to see the wood as well as the trees.

And I offer it humbly to God, of Whose gift and working—of Whose marvellous self-revelation to the minds and souls of living men—the Bible is the result.

NEVILLE, PRETOR:

PRETORIA,
July 1927.

Note.—The Prayer Book Version is used for citations from the Psalms.

PART I

THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I

THE TASK AND THE WAY TO GO ABOUT IT

To understand the Bible is to discriminate between things of varying importance. The undoubted appeal of the old view of the Bible was that it did not make this demand upon us. The verbally and literally inspired Book could be accepted "en bloc." "The Bible," said Dean Burgon—"is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth on the Throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the most High, supreme, absolute, faultless, unerring." Here is the very opposite to discrimination. Every word is God's word, and to be accepted as such. I am ready to die, if need be, in contesting this view of the Bible. For it fatally confounds—say—the God thought of as ordering the massacre of little children, with the God whose Kingdom Jesus saw most purely manifested in little children. It fatally confounds the God represented as ordering David to number the

people, and thereupon sweeping seventy thousand away in a pestilence as a punishment for David's obedience to the order (2 Sam. xxiv.), with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose will it is not that "one of these little ones should perish." I would lift the load of such confusion from the souls and consciences of others. But it implies discrimination on their part. Perhaps some one will reply: "Ah, but I cannot do it, I am a simple man or woman. I must take everything as it stands or else abandon everything. It is all or nothing for me." I reply that our Lord must come to the rescue of such people in their dismay. For He did not hesitate to make the greatest demands on the perceiving and understanding faculties of His hearers. He patently refused to give them anything just "pat" for them to swallow unthinkingly. He expected them to read the signs of the times. He left behind no infallible documents or writings containing the Gospel. He trustfully relied on the capacity of human faculties, guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit, to understand, think out and spread the Gospel.

Hence let us pray in the words of St Paul: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment, so that ye may prove the things that differ" (Phil. i. 9-10).

There are three great truths, which, if borne in mind in reading or hearing the Bible, will lighten much difficulty and alleviate much perplexity.

(1) The first is, that we must substitute for the idea of the Bible as a book which is in every word dictated by God, the realization that the Bible is the record of truths given to men through prolonged experience. The Bible would never have been written on parchment had not its contents been previously written on human hearts. The Word of God was present and was known as such in the Church of both the Old and New Testaments—the Old Israel and the New—before ever it was impressed in written form. The contrast between a divinely dictated book and a record of God's self-communication through human experience is great and all-important. The dictated book is held to be entirely divine, and man's part in it is reduced to an attitude of mechanical passivity. He is no more than a stenographer taking down God's words. This view of the Bible exaggerates the uniqueness of the Bible to the point of isolating it from all human experience. It throws no light on the working of God in the hearts of the vast numbers of His children other than Jews. It has no connection with the working of God in our hearts to-day. He does not dictate to us now. It implies that revelation has stopped and that God has ceased to communicate truth to man now. It is a mechanical and impersonal conception of God's dealings with men, such as is quite alien from the intensely personal methods used by our Lord in conformity with the will of the Father.

But the Book as a record of experience is linked

with the whole story of man both past and present. It is a human as well as a divine book. It is, more precisely, the story of the communication of the divine *through* the human. And as such it is true to the Incarnation. The more, then, the human part of the Bible is studied, understood, discriminated, the more does the wonder of God's use of human thoughts grow upon us; the more (as we shall see) does it become evident that the Bible is not merely a human book, but is—as a whole, though not in every part—the Word of God.

A great and wonderful experience awaits those who realize the humanity of the Bible. Its message, which has been well-nigh suffocated by literalism,—by the idolatry of the letter,—springs to new life again when, by the exercise of imagination, we lay hold of the flesh and blood which is behind the writing; when we lay bare the strivings of a people; when we feel human hearts beating through the pages—living hearts, passionate and bleeding, on which the living God wrote and re-wrote the truth about Himself. The great and cardinal passage to bear in mind, in our effort to do this, is in the writings of that most vividly human and personal prophet, Jeremiah. So little would he have his people imprisoned in mind and soul by the tradition come down to them from the past, that he declares: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I

made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jer. xxxi. 31-33).

Here is the very charter of that understanding of the Bible which emancipates us from slavery to its letter, and makes us free of its marvellous spiritual and personal processes. The book which admits us most freely to the "writing on the heart"—to the experiencing souls of living men—is that of the Psalms. The book truly is written in heart's blood. Is it man astounded by the mystery of the starry heavens? then Ps. viii. utters his wondering worship. Is it man confiding in the care and encouragement of God? then Ps. xxiii. perfectly breathes out his trust. Is it man confounded by the agonizing problem of life's injustice—by the arrogance and impunity of evildoers? then Ps. lxxiii. speaks home to him. Is it man in desolation and darkly over-shadowed by the grim spectre of death? then Ps. lxxxviii. is as a companion to the desolate and darkened of every age. And so on.

Yes, it is a human book, in which every height to which humanity can rise is scaled, every depth to which it can fall is plumbed. It takes man as

he is, so divine and so bestial: so heavenly in aspiration, so earthly in actuality. It hides nothing, it slurs and minimises nothing. All the squalor and degradation of the race is in it. Yet in and through it all Creative Holiness is at work, in persistent activity and in constant and unquenchable desire. For it tells of man in the making by God.

(2) The second great truth which, if gripped, will break the bars in which literalism has caged us, is that of Progressive Revelation. This follows from the first, namely the truth that the medium of God's self-communication was not dictated words, but the prolonged experience of a people. That experience constitutes a long story, and in the story are many chapters, many stages. It is the story of growth in the knowledge of God. And, like every other story of growth, it must be judged by its outcome. Just as we judge of a man by his mature manhood and not by his callow boyhood, so the faith of Israel must be judged not by its crude adolescence, but by its stature in manhood. Just as we judge of roses by those miracles of horticultural cultivation which we call Maréchal Niel, and yet the root of such a product is but a wild rose from the hedgerow, so we judge of the faith of Israel as it blossoms out in fullness of beauty under the training and pruning of God's hand, and yet the root of that faith is the wild natural religion of the Semitic race.

Here we lay firm hold upon what is nothing less

than the Master Key, which can unlock difficulty after difficulty in the Old Testament. Those difficulties have to do with the savage and very limited conceptions of God, which are to be found in some of the earlier chapters of the story of Israel. As the Jew struggled for a place in Palestine, amid his fellow-Semites and cousins the Canaanites who were there before him, he looked upon Jehovah as a tribal war-god. Yet it was out of such conceptions that he was led—out of a practical polytheism up to the heights of pure monotheism. That is, out of a belief in many gods into the belief in one God. Similarly as regards his conception of humanity. Just as he had a tribal conception of God, so he had a tribal conception of man. He had to be led out of the one as out of the other. He had to learn the value of the individual soul in the sight of God, by contrast with the submergence of the individual in the fortunes of the tribe. (Contrast Ezek. xviii. with the Second Commandment.) We shall return to this point.[1]

It is as though we were listening to a thin, feeble tune as it gradually swells out, in ever deepening and growing volume and beauty, into full diapason. Thus the truth of God and of man was deepened, clarified, enriched, in the heart and conscience of the people. The Old Testament is the amazing romance of an awakening of the soul and conscience to the unity, the righteousness, the holiness of God.

How fatal then is it, so to exaggerate the divine

[1] *Vid.* Chap. 12, Ezekiel, pp. 109-111.

element in the story as to put all its stages together and treat them all as of equal value. That is just what Dean Burgon and other upholders of verbal inspiration have done. The order of Jehovah to massacre little children is viewed as "the direct utterance of the Most High, supreme, absolute, faultless, unerring." Every word of the whole story is held to be absolutely true. Thus the earlier is confounded with the later, the childish with the mature, the crude with the purified. The great blazing truth of God, as given to the second Isaiah to apprehend, is hidden behind the figure of the cruel tribal deity of the book of the Judges. The earlier answers to the problem of innocent suffering are put on the same level with the later repudiation of those answers as insufficient. And so on. The master key turns in the lock of all these difficulties. Everything—cruelties, bestialities, everything of which man is capable—falls into place once we understand that God took the Jew "as a Syrian ready to perish," [1] as so much raw human material, and led and taught and pruned and purged, and thus with infinitely persistent patience, made him the channel of His self-communication. We need not hide anything, gloze or whitewash anything. For the more base and humble the beginnings, the more wonderful the outcome. The rougher the material, the more marvellous the working of the great Artist. The more human is man, the more divine is God. Let us remember that our Lord put the master key in

[1] Deut. xxvi. 5.

our hands in His great word, telling of the working of God in the world: "The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear" (Mark iv. 28).

(3) The third great truth, which lifts loads of difficulty from our minds, is that the Old Testament is an unfinished story, which is only fulfilled by the New. We are under the New Covenant, not under the Old. We are drinking the new wine, not the old. We are Christians, not Jews.

As we shall see, it is quite impossible to separate the New Testament from the Old, for our Lord built everything upon the foundation of the faith in God—purified, deepened, expanded—which was written on the heart of the Jew. Yet what He built on was incomplete and preparatory and in need of correction. We can see the truth of that in regard to His controversy with the Jews about the Sabbath. They had let the idea that God was resting from His creative work hide from them the deeper and complementary truth—ever championed by the prophets—that He is the living and creative God, still at work, as the future would show. Jewish Sabbatarianism was based on the idea that on one day in the week man should do nothing, like God! "No," said Jesus, "you are wrong. God is ever at work, and is at work now, therefore I do a good work on the Sabbath day" (John v. 17). So again, when His disciples asked Him whether they should bid fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans

who would not receive Him, He turned and rebuked them. Their appeal was to Elijah, to the Old Testament, to an exterminating deity. But Jesus " turned and rebuked them " (Luke ix. 55).

Hence the supreme importance of reading the Old Testament in the light of that which it does not contain—in the light of the New. O how disastrously has this been forgotten! In what dark dungeons of merely Old Testament ideas of God have innumerable souls been fast bound! No wonder that St Paul prayed for his converts that they might have discernment as regards things that differ. We have to be jealous that nothing shall dim the glorious and blazing light of the good news of the love of God in Christ. We may easily put it into a lantern filled with darkly smeared glass. We may easily hide the " foundation once laid, even Jesus Christ,"[1] by piling inferior material on to the top of it.

But we need not do so. For God, in His merciful and persistent working, has made possible a discriminating understanding of the Bible. The criticism of the Bible is often attacked as diabolic. But it is, despite all its human infirmities, of God. It has washed those smears from the glass. It has laid bare the " chosen, the precious corner stone " once laid. It has re-discovered and released the good news. Thanks be to God!

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 11.

CHAPTER II

IF ONE CHOSEN PEOPLE, WHAT OF ALL THE REST ?

We have seen that to read the Old Testament means following the story of a people's experience of God. "Salvation is from the Jews," as our Lord said (John iv. 22). But then what of all the other peoples in their multitudes ? What of man's tremendous ancestry ? The students of the story of man open up such infinite vistas of distance. "The point is that no naturalist supposes Man to descend from any living ape, still less from any living monkey. The scientific teaching is that Man is a scion of a stock common to him and the higher apes, the divergence of humanoid and anthropoid occurring perhaps between one and two million years ago." What of the shadowy being of which the remains have been found under strata of earth forty-five feet thick—the scientists call him Pithecanthropus ? "Human in stature, human in gait, human in all his parts, save his brain." He lived probably half a million years ago. Had God no dealings with him ? Or there is the Neanderthal man, who was "living in Europe towards the end of the last glacial epoch." He was "neither primitive nor anthropoid. He was a man though not ancestral to us. He used

fire ; he was a skilled artificer of flints which had a style of their own called Mousterian ; and he furnished his reverently buried dead not only with food for a long journey, but with ' beautifully wrought objects whose surrender implied a very real sacrifice on the part of the survivors.' " [1] Was he outside the range of the mercies of God ?

There is much in all this to make one dizzy. Our brains reel before the figures which are put before us, about the antiquity of man on this planet, let alone the antiquity of pre-human life. The traditional claim for the exclusive dealing of God with one little people, who are no more than a tiny fraction of the whole mass of humanity, is hard hit in minds aware of the story of man as recently unrolled. I remember Lord Balfour saying in conversation that, to his mind, the chief difficulty in Christianity was not its truth, but the fact that its benefits seemed to apply to so small a minority of mankind.

We must grasp the nettle. We must take a long breath and expand our minds to try to embrace the vast scope of the working of God's providence. His special revelation to Israel and in His Son Jesus Christ does not mean that He was absent from the countless multitudes of men all down the travailing ages. Rather, the special movement of His purpose down one path in the huge field of human history, allows us to be sure that He was at work in the whole field. That He chose, called, found, made one people to be the

[1] J. Arthur Thomson, *What is Man ?* pp. 7, 8, 11.

instruments of His will, is the guarantee that He did not "leave Himself without witness"[1] among all nations and at all times. The Old Testament is evidence of God, from His side, taking hold of a people. It is a story of divine initiative. But it is also the story of human quest for God. And in that way it is representative of the spiritual travail of the whole race. In that sense the truth of the religion of Israel makes all other religions true.

We know of the dealings of God with Israel comparatively late in its history. We see him led up to heights of vision and illumination. But earlier than this he was but a "Syrian ready to perish" (Deut. xxvi. 5), just an undifferentiated member of the human race. The Old Testament, therefore, constitutes a late chapter in a long story, a late scene in a vast drama. Its people would never have reached the heights on which they awoke to the vision of the one God, but for the climbing of the lower slopes by numberless generations of the human race. Israel mounted to God on steps built by the endeavour of the whole of mankind. In his person we see the arrival of a procession, which set out at a time so remote that it is beyond our sight. In him—the representative man—the travail, the quest of man is carried up to fulfilment.

In former days so little was known about the story of man in general that the people of the Old Testament were viewed as though they appeared in a vacuum, with no one behind them, no one

[1] Acts xiv. 17.

around them. The figures of Adam and Eve and of the Patriarchs seemed to stand silhouetted in hard outline against the white dawn of things. The stage appeared to be empty but for the presence of a few actors. But to-day the empty spaces have been filled by dense masses of humanity. We cannot see through these masses to any sheer beginnings. But we can grasp the meaning of the whole amazing spectacle by studying the figures at the front of the stage, thrown into relief against an impenetrable background.

We should not, then, be afraid of placing the people of the Bible in the setting of the story of the whole race, which story modern research unrolls as a great panorama. We should go to the books which attempt to popularize the results of scientific research; for example, Henry Drummond's *The Ascent of Man*; Arthur Keith's *The Antiquity of Man*; J. Arthur Thomson's *What is Man?*; H. G. Wells' *Outline of History*.

There is nothing to be feared in all this. For there is nothing in the evolution of the race from lowly origins, which is incompatible with the creation of man by God, once it is understood that He has not "rested from His work"[1] but is ever-creating. It is the part of science to try to trace the steps and stages of man's emergence from the animal world. It is the part of religion (and philosophy) to interpret the whole process. From religion comes the truth that God created and creates the world; from science comes the

[1] Gen. ii. 2.

information how He does so. The fierce and disastrous battle between religion and science during last century, arose from the claim of both parties to go beyond their proper parts. Religion, on the one hand, claimed that the folk-lore of Genesis furnished it with scientific knowledge of creation; science, on the other hand (in some of its representatives at any rate), claimed to explain away creation by substituting for it an automatic or mechanical evolution. The facts about man's derivation from a stock common to him and the higher apes are in no way to be feared or resented, unless those facts are interpreted by a philosophy which *reduces* man to his origins, and denies the significance of what is human. Such a philosophy or theorizing was no doubt very prevalent not so long ago. Many attempts were made to explain life in terms of material mechanism; to reduce thought, for instance, to the movements of so many particles of brain matter; to view consciousness as the insignificant by-product of physical machinery. Similarly, men have claimed that the colour of a landscape, as seen by an artist, is no more than the oscillations of light-waves of various lengths; or the music of a string symphony no more than the friction of horsehair with catgut. But such materialism has defeated itself. It is repudiated by the leaders of scientific thought. It is a bogey we need not fear. Every day a spiritual interpretation of the astounding universe, of which the workings are ever being laid bare, becomes more reasonable. Science studies life,

but it cannot explain it nor explain it away. It can but carefully describe its processes. The ultimate whence or wherefore of life are beyond its range and beyond its denial. The wonder of the whole process grows and grows, as men trace the steps and transitions in it, the passing of the inorganic into the organic, the mounting of the animal to the human, the appearance on the human plane of the supreme values of truth, beauty and goodness. Science stands reverent and silent before this mystery. It is less and less concerned to arrest the great interpretative utterance of religion : " O Lord, how manifold are thy works ; in wisdom hast thou made them all ; the earth is full of thy riches ! " (Ps. civ. 24).

Religion interprets life as the product of the creative activity of God. It, too, stands before a mystery which it cannot exhaustively explain. It cannot pretend to a revealed knowledge about the beginnings of things, but it reads the signs with which the facts of life abound ; it interprets experience. Just as it sees man's creative spirit at work to produce (or reproduce) spiritual value and meaning in—by the use of very humble material means—a string symphony or an oil painting ; so it sees the creative Spirit of God at work through the whole natural order, the flower and fruit of which are the spiritual values of truth, beauty and goodness. The master key which opens up—but does not explain away—life's mystery, is to judge of it not by its origins or mechanisms, but by its result. Thus we sub-

ordinate the lower to the higher, the means to the end, the material to the spiritual, the animal to the human. We do not reduce man to the monkey. Rather we stand in increased awe before the humanity of man so akin to, so continuous with, the animal world; yet none the less and all the more wonderfully, not an animal, but Man.

This is what religion can do without any hostility to or embargo upon the researches of science. It offers to us an interpretative faith by which we can live in God's wonderful world.

CHAPTER III

NATURAL RELIGION AND THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL

We are studying the people of the Old Testament, not as though they appeared in a vacuum, but as emerging late in the vast story of the whole human race. That is a story, in part, of religion. We have, then, to put the special religion of Israel against the background of religion in general. For several reasons. Firstly, because primitive natural religion is the soil in which all the great religions of the world, Judaism and Christianity included, have their roots. Secondly, because the separation and uniqueness of the religion of Israel is made all the more wonderful when its close connection with heathen religion around it is taken into account. To recur to the simile already used, the marvel of a cultivated rose-bloom is all the greater when set beside the dog-rose, its simple original. No doubt many students of Comparative Religion, who have displayed the links which the religion of the Old Testament (and indeed of the Bible as a whole) has with the religion of other peoples, have done so in order to destroy the claim to exclusiveness and uniqueness which has been made for the former. Yet that which aimed, in part, at being destructive, has proved to be constructive. The intimate kinship of

the religion of Israel with Semitic religion behind and around it, has deepened the relief in which the one stands out in contrast from the other. The undoubted likenesses have intensified the unlikeness. That which some men have sought to reduce to the level of other cults refuses to be so flattened out. It stands up with renewed significance It challenges attention and explanation more than ever.

What, then, is religion ? What is, as it were, the protoplasm which germinates in all the varied religions ? What is the root of their myriad developments ?

It is the reaction of man upon his wonderful environment. It is the expression of his sense that the world around him is the scene where unseen powers are in operation. It springs out of man's struggle for existence amid his strange surroundings. Its roots are practical, not speculative. It is primarily an attempt not to understand but to overcome the world. It is, as Sabatier said, a prayer for life. All religions start (to quote another authority) from an " act of faith in an unseen world which is mightier than the world of sense and time, and which is either already friendly or may be made friendly to the worshippers." [1] So a definition of religion has been framed that it is " the effective desire to be in right relations to the power or powers manifesting themselves in the universe." [2] There are different elements in

[1] D. S. Cairns, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, p. 22.

[2] Another definition is given by Thouless in his *Introduction to the Psychology of Religion :* " a felt, practical relationship with what is believed in as a superhuman being or beings."

this response of man to the mystery of his environment. Nature around him arouses in him awe, wonder, worship. It speaks to him of friendly, protecting agencies with which he can link himself. But it also arouses in him fear and anxiety. It seems to abound in hostile elements. It drives him on to find some secret of security amid the changes and chances of his mortality. So he grasps at charms to keep him safe; so he hedges himself with restrictions (taboos) against acts likely to bring disaster upon him; so he appeases, placates, propitiates; so he indulges in magical practices whereby to spell-bind the evil powers. Life drives him on with its urgent necessities of maintenance and reproduction, with its continual precariousness. Happiness and sorrow, health and sickness, life and death, urge him to intercourse with the unseen. It is a fundamental impulse in him so to do. Research shows that it is universal in mankind.

This finds a multitude of different impulse expressions. But there are common elements in them. Religion belongs not to separate individuals, but to individuals who are members of clans, tribes, groups. It is a social, a family thing. The gods in their multitude are powers presiding over different groups. They are the 'fathers' of families, bound up in one stock and lot with their children, linked with them by long-established custom.

Religion also is intensely local. The unseen powers are identified with or localized in certain

places or objects. A great mountain, a hoary and solitary tree, a remarkable rock, a cave, a fountain of water, an oasis in the desert—these, by immemorial tradition, are associated with divine manifestation. For Nature is full of life. There seems to be more in it than meets the eye. Its ordinary course, and its extraordinary accidents alike are eloquent of living power. In the seasons, in growth of plants, in the wild beasts, in sunshine and wind, in storm and thunder, there is evidence, to the primitive and natural heart of man, of spirit—of the gods at work.

Thus animism, daemonism, polytheism, are found by historical research. They are there already, however far back the rays of history fall. Nobody knows of their beginnings, they are prehistoric.

And certain forms of them are found in Semitic peoples: that is "the group of kindred nations including the Arabs, the Hebrews and Phœnicians, the Syrians, the Babylonians and Assyrians, which in ancient times occupied the great Arabian Peninsula, with the more fertile lands of Syria, Mesopotamia and Iraq, from the Mediterranean coast to the base of the mountains of Iran and Armenia."

There, especially, is polytheism, the clan-cult of this or that god, of, say, Chemosh by the Moabites, of Ashtaroth by the Philistines. The cult is compact of fixed, customary, unquestioned rites. Such rites are the things to which every one conforms, hardly knowing why, for rites precede

doctrine. They are the things to do. And they are linked with mythical stories, and are bound up with sacred sites and objects: they are the accompaniments of daily existence: they are to the fore at special emergencies such as war: they are the ways of living, on easy moral terms, with the clan-god, the "father" of one stock with his children, the protector and champion of his people.

Now unquestionably at the base of the religion of Israel is a clan-cult on all fours with the characteristic Semitic religion, so roughly sketched. The religion of Israel grew out of such soil. The worship of the one holy God of all the earth, runs right back to the cult of a Midianite deity, localized at Sinai, manifested in thunder, represented by images (ephods), communicated with by casting lots, linked by traditional tales with trees, with stones, with springs, sacrificed to at such sacred sites; worshipped under the form of a steer; treated as the Baal, that is the owner or lord of so much territory; venerated as the tribal leader in war, as the source of fertility of crops, beasts and men in peace; conformed to by customary ritual.

But is that all? If so, why be concerned with the religion of Israel? Why indeed? have many people said. But it is not all. For here we have only origins, the soil, the root, the wild plant. And we have to account for a marvellously different outcome, the glorious cultivated rose. We have to acknowledge a transforming, purifying, educating, separating power at work upon the "Syrian

ready to perish." We are brought—by the very contrast between beginning and end—face to face with God. That means historically, that we are confronted with the reality corresponding to the name, Jehovah.

Before passing on to trace the way in which Israel was differentiated from its origins (" thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee," Deut. viii. 2), it is well to pause on the permanent place that the main impulse of religion must occupy in life. Israel, as it was led forward in the knowledge of God, had to leave behind much that it shared in common with other Semites. Christianity, supervening on Judaism, had to leave behind much in that which it fulfilled. But neither Judaism nor Christianity, as positive religions, were, so to say, written on a clean slate. They were rather the result of graftings on to a wild root. And they can never be detached from their root. Christianity satisfies the instinctive sense of the human heart that this earthly scene manifests spirit. It sees reality underneath all the strange and often revolting gropings of heathenism. It confirms the world-wide phenomenon of religion as corporate, familiar, customary and organized. Especially does it insist that our natural instinct is right in being aware of a divine presence in this world as apprehended by the senses. The outcome is something often barely conscious, inarticulate, inexpressible—the Presence is of we know not what. Revelation enters to give consciousness and utterance to this

fundamental spiritual experience. It declares that God was there, all the long ages through which, under grotesque conceptions and strange and often filthy rites, men "felt after him if haply they might find him" (Acts xvii. 27). And the Christian relationship to God, based on the truth come forth from Himself, must be fed by that native impulse in us to be aware of the presence of God around us. It must build on the age-long experience of the race as sensitive to the unseen, as restless till it finds the great Other.

That means for us moderns, not a recurrence to primitive cult or orgy, but our having recourse to the poets who have the gift of interpreting Nature as alive with spiritual presence, and can awake in us the "elemental movements which underlie all spiritual apprehension of the unseen." So Wordsworth speaks to us of

> "Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realized,
> High instincts before which our mortal Nature
> Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
>
> . . . . .
>
> Those first affections, those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
> Are yet a master light of all our seeing:
> Uphold us, cherish and have power to make
> Our noisy years seem moments in the being
> Of the eternal Silence."

He tells how :

" The surface of the universal earth,
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Worked like a sea.

. . . . .

From Nature and her overflowing soul,
I had received so much, that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling ; I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still ;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air. . . .
. . . Wonder not
If high the transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature. . . ."
" For I have learned
To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains ; and of all that we behold
From this green earth ; of all the mighty world

Of eye and ear—both what they half create,
And what perceive ; well pleased to recognize
In Nature and the language of the sense
The author of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being."

Christian belief and Christian living are the culmination and consummation of such response of the living soul in man to the living soul in things. Revealed religion gathers up into itself, purifies and ratifies the search of man to find the living God. It can sift the gold from out of the dross of natural religion. In virtue of its knowledge of God as holy, good and loving, it can free the impulse to find union with the unseen from the baser elements, compounded of fear and sensuality, which hold it captive. For religious impulse itself is not necessarily moral or rational. It leads men to indulge strange idolatrous fancies about the powers that be, it urges them to dread practices whereby to placate the gods. It is mixed with horrible rites expressive of the central place in the life of reproduction. It makes the gods of fertility the sanction of sexual orgies. The problem is how to moralize, how to rationalize, the crude inextinguishable force of religious impulse.

But problem is not the last word, but rather testimony—the testimony of man in his millions to the reality of God over against him. Deep down in that testimony " pure religion and undefiled " has its roots, and on its validity Christianity fundamentally is based.

CHAPTER IV

THE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF THE JEW

As we consider the little clan of Semite peoples who were destined by God to play so wonderful a part in the religious story of man, it is profitable to take into account their geographical position and physical circumstances. To do so is to receive an intensified sense of the Providence of God in His selection of a people to be the instrument of His purpose, and in His shaping of nature and history to be in harmony with that purpose. Syria, of which Palestine or (as we should call it) the Holy Land is a part, holds a most notable place in the world's history. It is the country which extends for nearly 400 miles between the Arabian desert on the east and the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, with Mount Taurus as its boundary on the north, with desert again on the south. The historical geography of Syria, so far as her relations with the rest of the world are concerned, is summed up thus by Dr Adam Smith in his *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, a book to which I owe nearly all the substance of this chapter. "Syria is the northern and most fertile end of the great Semitic home—the peninsula of Arabia. But the Semitic home is distinguished by

its central position in geography between Asia and Africa, and between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which is Europe; and the rôle in history of the Semitic race has been also intermediary. The Semites have been the great middlemen of the world. Not second-rate in war, they have risen to the first rank in commerce and religion. They have been the carriers between East and West, they have stood between the great ancient civilizations and those which go to make up the modern world; while by a higher gift, for which their conditions neither in place not in time fully account, they have been mediary between God and man, and proved the religious teachers of the world, through whom have come its three highest faiths, its only universal religions. Syria's history is her share in this great function of intermedium, which has endured from the earliest times to the present day.

"To put it more particularly, Syria lies between two continents—Asia and Africa; between two primeval homes of men—the valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile; between two great centres of Empire—Western Asia and Egypt: between all these, representing the Eastern and ancient world, and the Mediterranean, which is the gateway of the Western and modern world. . . . Syria is not only the bridge between Asia and Africa: she is the refuge of the drifting populations of Arabia. She has been not only the high-road of civilizations and the battlefields of empires, but the pasture and the school of in-

numerable little tribes. She has been not merely an open channel of war and commerce for nearly the whole world, but the vantage ground and opportunity of the world's highest religions. In this strange mingling of bridge and harbour, of highroad and field, of battleground and sanctuary, of seclusion and opportunity—rendered possible through the striking division of her surface into mountain and plain—lies all the secret of Syria's history, under the religion which has lifted her fame to glory. As to her western boundary, no invasion, save of hope, ever came over that. Even when the nations of Europe sought Palestine (the Crusaders), their armies did not enter by her harbours till the coast was already in their possession. But across this coast she felt from the first her future to lie; her expectation went over the sea to isles and mainlands far beyond her horizon; and it was into the West that her spiritual empire, almost the only empire Syria ever knew, advanced upon its most glorious course." [1]

Such are the geographical circumstances under which we find the children of Israel when, in historical times, we find them established on the ridges which lie west of Jordan and overlooking the Mediterranean. Their position is of romantic interest, more especially if we concentrate on the people of Judæa and Jerusalem, who survived the obliteration of the Northern Kingdom and constituted the remnant through which the " salva-

[1] G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp. 5-7.

tion" which is "of the Jew" was given to the world. The position is as of an island amid the mighty waters of great empires. On the western side of the highlands on which Jerusalem is situated ran the oldest road in the world, the road along the coast, which connected the two old—immemorially old—centres of ancient civilization in the valley of the Nile, on the one hand, in the valleys of the Euphrates and the Tigris (Mesopotamia) on the other.

"Judæa . . . has all the advantage of insularity. It is singular how much of an island is this inland province. With the gulf of Arabah to the east, with the desert to the south, and lifted high and unattractive above the line of traffic, which sweeps past her on the west, Judæa is separated as much as by water from the two great continents, to both of which she otherwise belongs. So open at many points, the land was yet sufficiently unpromising and sufficiently remote to keep unprovoked foreigners away. Judæa was designed to produce in her inhabitants the sense of seclusion and security, though not to such a degree as to relieve them from the attractions of the great world, which throbbed closely past, or to relax in them those habits of discipline, vigilance and valour, which are the necessary elements of a nation's character. In the position of Judæa there was not enough to tempt her people to put their confidence in herself; but there was enough to encourage them to the defence of their freedom and a strenuous life. And while the isolation of

their land was sufficient to confirm the truth of their calling to a discipline and a destiny separate from other peoples, it was not so complete as to keep them in barbarian ignorance of the world, or to release them from those temptations to mix with the world, in combating which their discipline and their destiny could alone be realized." [1]

We must try to look out through the eyes of the Jew on his ridge upon the great world so near and yet so remote to him—the world represented by the endless caravans and proud armies ever raising the dust of the Old Road within sight of the people on the uplands. Ever and again the Pharaohs of Egypt marched northward to gain possession of Syria ; ever and again the Sultans of Mesopotamia swept westward to do likewise : the special aim of both was to gain control of the commercial gateway to the West, the rich cities of Tyre and Sidon, where dwelt the great carriers and sailors of antiquity, the Phœnicians. And the place where the great nations clashed was in the plain of Esdraelon or Megiddo,[2] just south of the Sea of Galilee, into which the Old Road from Egypt to the south, from Damascus to the east, debouched. For there was room there for the chariots and cavalry to deploy and there the great nations, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, ever fought : so that Megiddo was the recognized battlefield of the ancient world, a scene as devoted to fighting as the site behind the chapel at Rugby in *Tom Brown's School Days*. So that when the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 297-300. [2] Cf. p. 76.

Seer in the Book of the Revelation speaks of the last great battle of the world, the scene of the battle is to be, inevitably, Megiddo—" Spirits of devils, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty . . . And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Megedon " (Rev. xvi. 14, 16).

Thus dramatically was the Jew placed in the midst of world-politics. We can see the great empires surging around Zion as we read the writings of the great prophets. Those men included the world of mighty nations within their vision of the divine providence. In fact, it was in rising to meet the tremendous exigencies produced by imperial politics and campaigns in the eighth century and onwards that the Jew—under the guidance of the great prophets—came to a grasp of the world as a whole and to a faith in one God sovereign over all the world.

The school in which the Jew was educated in true religion was the school of history—a bitter school indeed. In the eyes of his successively mighty contemporaries—the potentates say of Egypt, of Nineveh and of Babylon—there was nothing remarkable in the little clan, so like other kindred clans, on the high ground west of Jordan. We can feel the contempt of the great world for the Jew in his apparent insignificance, as we read the words of the Assyrian general Rabshakeh, when the forces of Sennacherib were at the gates

of Jerusalem. "Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me . . . and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, the Lord will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?' Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" (2 Kings xviii. 31-35).

But the "little people on the ridge" are remembered to-day when the great Sultans are forgotten. And if archæology extracts the Empires of Egypt or Mesopotamia from oblivion, it is mainly in order to throw further light upon the people of the Old Testament.

In truth the more the background, environment, circumstances of the Jew are studied, the greater is the accumulation of assurance that we are dealing with a phenomenon inexplicable by merely secular standards. Here is the Hand of God moulding, shaping all things to an end: "by selection of a people out of that race of mankind which have been most distinguished for their religious temperament, and by settlement on a land both near to and aloof from the main streams of human life, where they could be at once spectators of history and yet not its victims, where they could at once

enjoy personal communion with God, and yet have some idea also of His providence of the whole world, where they could at once gather up the experience of the ancient world, and break with it into the modern. There is no land which is at once so much a sanctuary and an observatory as Palestine: no land which, till its office was fulfilled, was so swept by the great forces of history, and was yet so capable of preserving one tribe in national continuity and growth: one tribe learning and suffering and rising superior to the successive problems these forces presented to her, till upon the opportunity afforded by the last of them she launched with her results upon the world. It is the privilege of the student of the historical geography of Palestine to follow all this process of development in detail. If a man can believe that here is no directing hand behind our universe and the history of our race, he will, of course, say that all this is the result of chance. But for most of us only another conclusion is possible. It may best be expressed in the words of one who was no theologian but a geographer—perhaps the most scientific observer Palestine has ever had. Karl Ritter says of Palestine: 'Nature and the course of history shows that here from the beginning onwards there cannot be talk of any chance.'" [1]

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

CHAPTER V

PROPHECY

All that we have considered about the background and circumstances against which and amid which the people of Israel emerge into history, enforces the question : How did they come to be separated for their great destiny ? What prevented their " reversion to type," their reabsorption by paganism, their relapse to the welter of nature religions in which their neighbours—their cousins and fellow-Semites—were sunk ?

The answer is : One thing more than any other, namely, Prophecy. If any one asks where he should begin in his reading of the Old Testament, the answer is—With the great Prophets. They appear late in the story of Israel ; nevertheless they are the way of entrance into an understanding of that story. For it was greatly through their inspired ministry that the earlier religion and earlier faith were cleansed, clarified and expanded. It was also from the standpoint of their teaching that much of the earlier history and traditions were cast into literary form and preserved in the shape in which they appear in the Old Testament.

The succession of these great teachers begins with the 8th century B.C. The ministry of the

first of the succession, Amos, begins in 760 B.C. They appear in the light of modern history, for the researches of students take the history of the Semitic world, of Egypt and Mesopotamia, enormously further back than the eighth century. The secular history of the people surrounding Israel is well known, on the evidence of inscriptions and excavations, for many generations before the time of the great prophets. And there is historical certainty about the history of surrounding empires contemporary with the prophetic teachers. Apart from the Bible, historians know of the rise of Assyria in the 8th century; the fall of that Empire and its supersession by Babylon at the turnover from the 8th to the 7th century; the fall in turn of Babylon before Persia in 538 B.C. But from the prophets we get light upon the inner significance of these rises and falls of great empires. Amid the historical movements of these powers we hear the voices of these inspired men, wrestling with the circumstances of themselves and their people, reading the signs of the times in which they lived, warning, rebuking, challenging others in the name of the one, holy and righteous God. They looked at history as the sphere and arena of the divine purpose. They counted on events to enforce their teaching. They did not expect that the force of their bare words would achieve the purposes for which God sent them to utter them.

It must be remembered that there were prophets before Amos and his successors. Pro-

phecy, like the rest of the religion of Israel, has its roots in primitive Semitic religion. Other Semitic tribes had "seers" whom they believed to be messengers of their gods. Indeed, to understand the origin of prophecy we have to go back into those common phenomena in natural religion, diviners, seers, soothsayers, oracle-mongers, clairvoyants, fortune-tellers. That such is the origin of prophecy is evident from the story of Saul and the loss of his father's asses. "Behold, now," says Saul's servant, "there is in this city a man of God, and he is a man that is held in honour; all that he saith cometh surely to pass; now let us go thither: peradventure he can tell us concerning our journey whereon we go. . . . (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he said, Come and let us go to the seer, for he that is now called a Prophet was before-time called a Seer)" (1 Sam. ix. 6-9). Here are the roots of Jewish prophecy in second-sight and fortune-telling.

Similarly, we see that the origins of Jewish prophecy run back into something very akin to the hysteria and the dances of dervishes. For we read of Saul that he "went to Naioth in Ramah: and the spirit of God came upon him also, and he went on and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes and he also prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say: 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (1 Sam. xix. 23, 24). The question

is not complimentary : it suggests the rebuke of what is perilously exciting. Compare Michal, Saul's daughter's, rebuke of David, " How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself ! " (2 Sam. vi. 20). Prophecy, dancing and nakedness ! Here, indeed, are queer and dangerous phenomena.

But we need not, once again, be afraid of the origins of the religion of Israel. They do but heighten the wonder of later transformations. The crude beginnings out of which Jewish prophecy grew is the clearest instance of the progressive purpose which is to be traced throughout the experience of Israel. Once more we have to judge by outcome and result, not by beginnings and origins. The wonder and uniqueness of the prophecy in its later and classical days are seen to be all the more significant when we turn up its primitive roots and lowly early associations : just as the monkeyish origins of the human race do but throw into sharper relief the fact that man has been separated from his origins and is man.

The same vital point is illustrated as regards divination, or the declaration of the divine will. " In every early religion divination plays a great part. To members of a tribe it is of essential importance that at critical moments the will of their god should be declared. So it was in early Israel. There, as in other nations, specific means were used for discovering the will of Jehovah. For

example, the Urim and Thummim were evidently some form of sacred lot by which fateful decisions could be reached. In Israel, however, there was a gradual, if often interrupted, advance to higher levels of religious belief. The employment of such crude and mechanical means of discovering the Divine purpose fell more and more into the background. The prophet rendered them unnecessary. He came forward claiming to possess the power of entering into the meaning of the Divine intention. As prophecy rose from height to height of religious insight, even the dream and the ecstatic vision played a less essential part. Man in the fullness of his self-conscious powers was admitted to intercourse with his Maker. In Babylon, on the contrary, religion followed a different line of development. There divination gained a complete ascendency. The interpretation of omens came to be regarded as a fine art. Every possible form of magic was practised. Chaldean soothsayers were famous throughout the Eastern world. The contrast with Israel is patent. Prophecy can develop only where personality counts for much. In Babylon, so far as the evidence enables a judgment to be formed, it counted for nothing. That which found favour there was not the rugged outstanding character of the man of God, but the smooth and supple skill of the professional reader of omens. The exaggerated prevalence of divination implies the presence of conditions that must have stifled prophecy." [1]

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 429.

Thus modern research with its passion for unravelling origins, affinities, similarities, makes more forcible and indubitable the uniqueness of the Old Testament, containing, as it does, so much that is akin to other Semitic religions, which yet is not identical but different.

A further word is necessary by way of introduction to the study of the Prophets. Some one has defined prophecy as history written before the event. A prophet thus has been viewed merely as predicting the future—sometimes the far future. This is a very partial and misleading view. The prophets were primarily men with a message for their own time. They had great lessons of righteousness and moral reality to enforce upon their contemporaries. Some of them were religious statesmen and patriots with a great concern for the policy of the rulers of their people. It is to treat their writings with a slavish literalism and in a mechanical fashion to go back to them as a quarry whence only to dig predictions. Yet along with their absorption in the present they had also a vision for the future. Again and again they saw through the present to the evidence which it contained of coming judgment or deliverance. They saw moral laws at work producing certain consequences. Their conviction that God was at work in the present led them on to forecast how He would work in the future. Thus, stage by stage there grew a volume of expectation, a broadening, deepening vision of the Kingdom of God. In ways doubtless beyond their indi-

vidual understanding, their teaching constitutes a high-road of approach to the Day of the Lord. Yet when it did come it brought that which went far beyond their vision or expectation.

CHAPTER VI

AMOS

The door by which to enter into a proper understanding of the Old Testament is to be found in the great prophets of the 8th century B.C. So we come to the first in the great series—Amos. He has been called the most wonderful phenomenon in the history of the human spirit. Through his ministry and that of his successors, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, etc., Israel awoke to the knowledge of One God. "Israel awoke while Assyria, Babylon and Tyre slumbered and clung to their dreams. Israel was the child that awoke first and wandered out of the house into the wonderful dew-pearled morning, and saw the mountains and the villages shining with a strange new radiance, and felt neither lonely nor afraid because of the new Presence. But the dreamers within doors slumbered on through their drunken dreams and barbarous deities, Nergal and Thoth and Baal and Astarte, and thought Israel mad with its morning song of the One and Only God. To the other nations, says Lotze, Israel seemed mad. To us to-day the Hebrews seem to have been the one sober people in a world of drunkards." [1]

[1] D. S. Cairns, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, p. 74.

We know the date and the historical circumstances of Amos. They occur in modern times, very late in the contemporary stories of Egypt and of Mesopotamia. Amos appeared with his tremendous message in the time of Uzziah, king of Judah and of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. His date is 760 B.C. It was a time of prosperity and of expansion, of material development and its consequences in hollow and non-moral religious observance. The dominant fact of the political situation which faced Amos was the gigantic empire of Assyria with its capital at Nineveh. The westward advance of Assyria was by far the most important event in the 8th century. By the time at which Amos spoke, Assyria had already crushed the kingdom of Syria, of which the capital was Damascus.

Amos, like the other prophets, was not a founder but a reformer. He and his fellow-Jews were the inheritors of an ancient tradition. We must think of them as possessed of this tradition though, probably, not much of it was by then written down in literary form. It carried right back into the dim distances of the earliest days. For in the tradition of the Jew was the folk-lore and myth common to them and to other Semitic peoples. But the national or clan memory of the Jew had its own individual content. Thus it went back to the call of Abraham out of Haran, and to the stories of his descendants, who came into Canaan and went or were driven into Egypt. Above all this there was in the national tradition the

indelible memory of the great deliverance from Egypt. From this deliverance in the thirteenth century B.C., Israel as a people dated its rise. Its most famous leader was Moses, the law-giver, to whom was revealed the new name of Israel's God—Jehovah. Then the national memory recalled the coming of the Jewish tribes out of the wilderness into Canaan, and the long struggle for a footing there amid their fellow-Semites, the Canaanites: and then the successive rise of the judges and the first of the prophets, Samuel: and then the forging of the tribes into a national unity through the making of the Kingdom of Saul, and of David, the singer, and of Solomon the wise man: and then the breaking of the Kingdom into northern and southern segments by the schism of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat: and the struggles against Canaanitish heathenism under the leadership of Elijah and Elisha. All this was in the national consciousness of Amos and his contemporaries. And, in addition, there was a legal tradition in existence, going back in its origin to Moses, but added to progressively according to the successive needs of the passing generations. And in addition to the law a mass of ceremonial rite and custom in long-established operation.

Amid a people with these memories, traditions and present circumstances, Amos appears. His message is grounded in an appeal to the past. The God in whose Name he speaks in the present, is the God who has taken the initiative and acted in the past. "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken

against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt saying: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (iii. 1, 2). Here is the note which, struck again and again, rings through the Old Testament. It is the witness to the divine initiative, action, will, purpose.

But the message of Amos, while grounded in the past, is for the present. He is the prophet of righteousness, speaking in the Name of the living, the holy God. He sees that the moral law, which flows from the nature of God, applies not only to Israel but to surrounding peoples. Yet it applies all the more to Israel, because of Israel's special calling and privileges. So he condemns the formal immoral religion, tolerant even of prostitution at its sanctuaries, which he finds in existence. He pillories the social injustice and oppression, which is rampant alongside of elaborate religious observances. He is shocked by the luxury, the drunkenness, the land-grabbing of his times. He sees its variance with the reality of the righteousness of God, and the divine protest breaks out through him: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs: for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (v. 21-4). This message is delivered out of an overwhelming sense of compulsion. Then the royal-chaplain at Bethel

opposes Amos : " O thou seer, go flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread and prophesy there ; but prophesy not again any more at Bethel ; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house." Amos replies : " I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son ; but I was an herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees : and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me : Go, prophesy unto my people Israel " (vii. 12-15). Here is religious experience at its intensest pitch ; here is intercourse between the spirit of man with the Spirit of God, breaking into utterance : " The lion hath roared, who will not fear ? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy ? " (iii. 8).

By entering into the ministry of Amos, we take a cross-section through the process of Israel's religious education. It is as though we opened a furnace-door in which metal is being smelted. What is in the fire is the faith of Israel. It is being purged of impurities and is to be wrought into closer agreement with the reality of God. Amos hardly expects his words to produce conviction and change of heart in his hearers. He looks to the agency of events to do that. He sees the furnace being heated into which the religion of Israel is to be plunged. He sees the storm brewing which is to break on his people in their careless security. He sees the day approaching which, though it is the day of the Lord, " is darkness, and not light " (v. 18).

Thus he interprets the signs of the times. The

threat of Assyria, looming up from the East, is welcomed. "For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the Lord, the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the brook of the Arabah" (vi. 14). Amos looks to history to vindicate his message.

It is to history then that we turn, in order to trace the course of events amid which the faith of Israel was schooled and deepened and purified. We are not tracing the piecing together of ideas by philosophic minds, but the burning into heart and soul of truths of experience. We are dealing here not with fancy or legend or tradition, but with fact.

CHAPTER VII

THE TEMPERING OF FAITH IN THE FURNACE OF HISTORY

We have had a glimpse into the process of the forging of the faith of Israel. History was, as we have said, the furnace. And it is to the course of history that we now turn. That course is well known. It is a mistake to think of it as ancient history. It is modern. Nor does the evidence for it depend upon the Bible. The historians and archæologists have reconstructed it from monuments and inscriptions and the remains of great imperial cities.

Within thirty years of the ministry of Amos and within six years of the call of the great prophet Isaiah (Isa. vi.), the Assyrian menace materializes. The great Pul (Tiglath Pileser II), who came to the Assyrian throne in 745 B.C., launches on the westward campaign in which he besieges Damascus and conquers Syria. He is succeeded by Shalmanasser IV in 727 B.C., and he in turn by Sargon in 722 B.C. And in 721 B.C. the Northern Kingdom, already as regards Zebulon, Naphthali and Galilee acquainted with the armies of Pul, falls before Sargon, and Samaria, the capital, is besieged and captured. The northern tribes are swept

into exile (2 Kings xviii. 9). We can feel imaginatively the trembling of the whole land and people at this reverberating catastrophe. It left the destinies of the Jew to be carried on by the remnant left intact in the southern kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem. The fall of their northern relations was a tremendous object-lesson for the southerners to ponder and profit by. It summoned them to read the signs of the times.

But Judah and Jerusalem were not left to learn lessons as spectators from the experience of others. They, too, were plunged into days of crisis. In 727 B.C. the good king Hezekiah had succeeded Ahaz on the throne, and is the ally of Isaiah in religious reform. His long and pious reign is in 701 B.C. broken into by a dreadful emergency. For in that year Sennacherib, who had succeeded in 705 to the murdered Sargon, invades Syria and Palestine and threatens Jerusalem (2 Kings xviii. 13-16). Jerusalem escapes for the moment by dint of the submission of Hezekiah to the Assyrian and the paying of tribute. But hardly had the tribute been paid than Sennacherib, himself advancing to meet Egypt, sent back to Jerusalem a second besieging army under his general Rabshakeh.

The story of this dual onset constitutes the climax of the drama of Isaiah's ministry and leadership. "The stage is narrow and the time short, but the action one of the most critical in the history of Israel, taking rank with the Exodus from Egypt and the return from Babylon. To Isaiah himself it marks the summit of his career.

For half a century Zion has been preparing for, forgetting and again preparing for, her first and final struggle with the Assyrian. Now she is to meet her foe, face to face, across her own walls. For forty years Isaiah has predicted for the Assyrian an uninterrupted path of conquest to the very gates of Jerusalem, but certain check and confusion there. Sennacherib has overrun the world and leaps upon Zion. The Jewish nation await their fate, Isaiah his vindication, and the credit of Israel's religion one of the most extraordinary tests to which a spiritual faith was ever subjected." [1]

My readers must go to the book of Isaiah to read the great epic of Jerusalem's deliverance (see chapters i., xxii., xxxiii., xxxvi.-xxxvii.). It would spoil in the telling here. The bare fact is certainly established (an echo of it appears in Herodotus) that, having swept up to the very walls of Jerusalem, the Assyrian was compelled by some calamity (perhaps plague) apart from war, to withdraw before the sacred city itself was taken. The faith of Isaiah and, following his leadership, of Israel, received a most emphatic historical vindication. The victory gave rise to some of the finest of the Psalms. For example the 46th and the 48th. " God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved. . . . For lo, the kings of the earth are gathered and gone by together. They marvelled to see such things,

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. i., p. 306.

they were astonished and suddenly cast down. Fear came upon them and trouble, as upon a woman in her travail. . . . Walk about Zion and go round about her, tell all the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks and set up her houses, that ye may tell them that come after. For this God is our God for ever and ever; He shall be our guide unto death."

Here, indeed, faith is a-forging.

Yet Israel fell from the heights of exultant faith and gratitude into an abyss of reaction. Within four years of the deliverance King Hezekiah died (698 B.C.—2 Kings xxi.), and his son Manasseh inaugurated a long reign of idolatry and licence. For fifty-five years "he did that was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built again the high places, which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made an Asherah, as did Ahab king of Israel, and worshipped all the host of heaven and served them. . . . And he made his son to pass through the fire, and practised augury, and used enchantments, and dealt with them that had familiar spirits, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord . . . and he seduced the people to do that which is evil" (2 Kings xxi. 2-9).

Here is all the jungle of current natural religion coming back to overgrow the space cleared by the fire of Isaiah's righteous passion for the holiness and onlyness of Jehovah. Here is the reversion of

the Jew to type : his slipping back to the level of the religion of surrounding Semites. It is an instance of that which occurred and recurred in the story of Israel's education. "Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2 Kings xxi. 16). In this carnage, tradition says that Isaiah met his end. The great statesman of five reigns, on whom the whole nation had rested in the day of emergency, was put to death by Manasseh. It is said that he was "sawn asunder."

But his works followed after him. The blood of the martyr became the seed of the Jewish Church. He had left an impression upon the history and faith of his people which not the longest reign of an apostate king could efface. He became the great name in a school of religious thought. The principles of the teaching of the great prophets of the eighth century—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah—lived on, to find practical expression in the great reform movement which ensued in the reign of the good king Josiah.

Josiah was the grandson of Manasseh (Amon having been murdered after two years' reign), and he came to the throne as a lad of eight years old. The great reforms of his reign are called Deuteronomic (second law). They represent the effort to profit by the appalling fate which had overtaken the Northern Kingdom, and to put into practical effect the denunciations of the great prophets against idolatry. To understand the

place that Deuteronomy holds in the history of Israel and in the moulding of its sacred literature, is to go far in the understanding of how the Old Testament came to be put together. For Deuteronomy marks an epoch not only of practical religious reform, but also of great literary activity. We have the great privilege of being allowed to look at this period through the eyes of the most distinctively personal and vivid of all the prophets —Jeremiah.

CHAPTER VIII

DEUTERONOMY

The religious reformation which was set on foot in 621 B.C. in the reign of King Josiah (see 2 Kings xxii., xxiii.) was an endeavour at once to put into practical effect the teachings of the prophets, and to profit by the lessons of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The reformation was in conformity with the Second Book of the Law, the presence of which along with other material gives its name to the book called Deuteronomy.

We learn from Isaiah of his possessing disciples. And there is little doubt that he formed a religious brotherhood, held together by his prophetic teaching. "Bind thou up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. And I will wait for the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (Isa. viii. 16, 17). This "secured the preservation of his own prophecies and perhaps those of others also. It created a religious organization to carry out the programme of the prophets, which when it could no longer work openly, as in the time of the idolatrous King Manasseh, could work underground and issue in the Deuteronomic reformation."[1]

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 443.

Considerable mystery surrounds the discovery of "the book of the Law in the House of the Lord" by Hilkiah the high-priest (2 Kings xxii.). This book is almost certainly the code of special laws which are to be found in Deuteronomy, chapters xii. to xix. It contains the fundamental principle of Deuteronomic legislation, namely the abolition of the local sanctuaries and "high places" and the centralization of sacrificial worship at Jerusalem alone. This is called the Law of the Central Sanctuary. "But when ye go over Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God causeth you to inherit, and he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then it shall come to pass that the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes . . . and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord. . . . Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings and there thou shalt do all that I command thee" (Deut. xii. 10-14). This law contradicts both the provisions of the earlier law as found in Exod. xx., and also the practice of earlier days. "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings . . . in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come unto thee, and I will

bless thee" (Exod. xx. 20, 24). In the days of Samuel and of Saul and of David altars were erected all over the country without scruple and sacrifices offered on them. "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah . . . and his return was to Ramah, for there was his house; and there he judged Israel: and he built there an altar unto the Lord" (1 Sam. vii. 15, 16). "And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord" (1 Sam. xi. 15).

This makes the writing of the Deuteronomic code by Moses an impossibility. And there is no doubt that the code represents "the fundamental ideas of the prophets which were read back to an early period, and were put into the form of laws and exhortations which Moses was supposed to have delivered to the Israelites when they were on the point of entering the promised land. Such a method may seem strange to us with our present-day ideas. It must, however, be remembered that in ancient times very different literary standards obtained. In order to gain added authority for a message it was not unusual to ascribe it to a great name of a former age."[1]

Some people feel dismay at the loss of authority which they think is implied in this non-attribution

[1] Chapman and Weatherhead, *The Old Testament and To-day*, p. 67.

of the book to Moses' authorship. But second thoughts will remove this dismay. For we are dealing—as we have seen—with the inspiration not of documents but of living men, and with the divine schooling of a people in a prolonged experience. There is no reason to doubt that the basal teaching of Deuteronomy about God, pure worship and right conduct, goes back to the inspiration of Moses, and represents that pure religion, from the level of which the popular religion of the people was apt ever and again to fall. Further, it was then given to the inspired men of later generations—the prophets—to preserve and reinterpret the Mosaic tradition and to do so in the light of national experience. Deuteronomy is full of lessons drawn from experience. It represents the clarifying and deepening of men's vision of God. It has the authority of God immanent and at work in Israel from generation to generation. There is no place for dismay but rather for reassurance. And along with the reassurance goes the relief of being discharged from the task of reconciling enactments in Deuteronomy which contradict the earlier law, and of not having to maintain that Moses knew of events which took place several centuries after his lifetime, or that he wrote the account of his own death!

Deuteronomy then emanates from the seventh century and represents the second main stage of the development of the Law. Both its legal requirements and its exhortations are coloured

through and through with the experience of the spiritual and moral dangers into which Israel had come and to which it had succumbed. The picture of the spiritual corruption rampant in the reign of Manasseh (2 Kings xxi.) shows us the target at which Deuteronomy is aimed. Further, the Law of the Central Sanctuary is the fruit of the repeated experience that it was at the various local "high places"—sanctuaries and religious sites taken over by Israel from immemorial use by their cousins the Canaanites—that a reversion to Semitic paganism and a falling away from the worship of Jehovah were most apt to occur. History therefore dictated the urgent need of a centralized control over worship, sacrifice and priesthood: and it is this control which was the object of the Law of the Central Sanctuary.

The Law of Deuteronomy has therefore a very important place in the drama of the separation of Israel from its origins and environment. It was ordained by man and yet was given by God as a great weapon with which to combat the ever-present and ever-recurring danger, that the people of God should suffer a spiritual reversion to the heathenism, out of which they had been extricated.

Further, Deuteronomy not only throws a great light on the process of Israel's legal development, but it opens up a way of understanding into the way in which the history of Israel was shaped. It is generally agreed that much of the history recorded from Genesis to the end of the books of Kings is derived from two historians who lived

in the ninth or eighth century. One has been called J, from his use of Jehovah as the name of God, and he is thought to have lived in the Southern Kingdom : the other has been called E, from his use of Elohim as the name of God, and he is thought to have lived in the Northern Kingdom. But the material compiled by both as we have it in the Old Testament was unquestionably re-moulded by writers who looked back on the past from the standpoint of Deuteronomy. Thus we get what is called " Prophetic History " : that is, history written so as to enforce the message with which the great prophets were charged. It is the history of the past made to tell upon the present. It is not so much a bare record of the past, but a review or commentary on the past as seen in the light of the present. It is, so to say, history written backwards. To understand the stories of the Judges, the account of the ministry of Samuel and the making of the Kingdom, the annals of the reigns of various kings, it is necessary to bear in the mind the keen and prolonged struggle of prophetic men to combat idolatry and heathenism. For they go back on the past that its story may carry a telling message to their own generation. They draw upon the past for material for sermons. They view the past through the spectacles of a religious philosophy of history. The books of Judges, Samuel 1 and 2, Kings 1 and 2 abound in illustrations. For instance Judges, chapter ii. 11 : " And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the

Lord and served the Baalim, and they forsook the Lord the God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves down unto them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about. . . . And the Lord raised up judges which saved them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they hearkened not unto their judges, for they went a-whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves down unto them: they turned aside quickly out of the way wherein their fathers walked, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so."

Every word of such a passage beats with the prophets' passion of loyalty to God and with the kindred hatred of apostasy from Him.

So it is with the tragic story of Solomon who rose so high and yet fell so far (1 Kings xi.). So, too, with the account of schismatic revolt headed by Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (1 Kings xii. to xiv.) or the vivid drama of Elijah's struggle with Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings xvi. 29 to xxii.). Here were matchless lessons with which to rally wavering hearts in the battle, waged in the seventh century, for the pure worship of the one God.

The same interest is evident throughout the

whole of both books of the Kings. I take a later passage at random: "Jehoash was seven years old when he began to reign and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Jehoash did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Howbeit the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places" (2 Kings xii. 1-3).

Thus were good examples and bad exhibited by the Deuteronomic historians to their contemporaries, that the latter might learn from them lessons of loyalty to God. Thus does "prophetic history" co-operate with the religious aims and the practical religious reforms of Deuteronomy.

The significance of history, of law, and of the ministry of prophets is focused in Deuteronomy. Any one who sees where Deuteronomy comes in, has got to the heart of the story of Israel's education in faith.

CHAPTER IX

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE JEWISH MONARCHY

We must turn from the study of Deuteronomy, and the religious reformation it promoted, to history. A stream of world-shaking events broke round and upon the little kingdom of Judah, its good king Josiah and his reforming efforts. A cataract of noise made by the rise and fall of great imperial powers sounds in the ears of those who read the record of the last days of the Jewish monarchy.

As the reign of the good King progressed, the world around Palestine vibrated more and more with the tremors caused by the staggering of the huge and brutal empire of Assyria to its fall. There was a rush of hostile powers—Scythian, Chaldean, Median—to prey upon this great morbid world-power. Where the carcase was, there were the vultures gathered together. We can hear the voice of Nahum the prophet, crying doom over proud and tyrannical Nineveh.

" Woe to the bloody city ! It is all full of lies and rapine ; the prey departeth not. The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels ; and prancing horses and jumping chariots ; the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, and

the glittering spear ; and a multitude of slain and a great heap of carcases : and there is none end of the corpses ; they stumble upon their corpses : because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold I am against thee, saith the Lord of Hosts . . . and I will make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing stock. And it shall come to pass that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee and say, Nineveh is laid waste : who will bemoan her ? Whence shall I seek comforters for thee ? . . . Thy shepherds slumber, O King of Assyria : thy worthies are at rest : thy people are scattered upon the mountains and there is none to gather them. There is no assuaging of thy hurt : thy wound is grievous : all that hear the bruit of thee clap the hands over thee ; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually ? " (Nahum iii.).

In 625 Nabopolassar, the Chaldean (Babylonian), asserted his independence from Assyria. And he then threw in his lot with the hordes of barbarous northmen, the Scythians, who bore down in waves from the Caucasus into Syria and Mesopotamia, carrying fire and slaughter with them. We can feel the wind of these movements blowing through the words of the prophet Habakkuk. " Behold ye among the nations, and regard, and wonder marvellously : for I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and

hasty nation, which march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful . . . their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves . . . and their horsemen come from far; they fly as an eagle that hasteth to devour. They come all of them for violence; their faces are set eagerly as the east wind; and they gather captives as the sand" (Hab. i. 5-9).

In 609 the Scythian and Chaldean forces, reinforced by the Medes under Cyaxares, began to lay siege to Nineveh.

Into this maelstrom another great power plunged. Egypt, which earlier in the century had been subject to Assyrian domination, had many scores to pay off against Nineveh. So in 608 Pharaoh-Necho II marched up the sea-coast road through Palestine, in order to be "in at the death" of Assyria. In face of this, King Josiah was infatuated enough to come down from the security of his hill-fortress and to attempt to resist the advance of Necho. The plain of Megiddo,[1] lying directly on the road from Egypt to the Euphrates, was once again the scene of a bloody battle: and there Josiah fought and fell. The Chronicler in later days drew the moral. "After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho, king of Egypt, went up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. But Necho sent ambassadors to him,

[1] Cf. p. 43.

saying: What have I to do with thee, thou King of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war; and God hath commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not. Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho, from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at King Josiah; and the King said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. So his servants took him out of the chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and was buried in the sepulchres of his fathers" (2 Chron. xxxv. 20 ff.).

Judah thus passed under the dominion of Egypt. After Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, had reigned for three months, "Pharaoh-Nechoh put him in bands at Riblath in the land of Hamath (north of Damascus) . . . and he took him away and he came to Egypt and died there" (2 Kings xxiii. 33). Necho then appointed his brother Jehoiakim to the throne, and put him under heavy tribute. His reign is marked by a reaction from the ideals of Josiah and by a reversion to the iniquities of Manasseh. We can make a picture for ourselves of king and people casting round for some secret of security in those perilous times, and turning to other gods and cults in the hope of finding deliverance.

Meanwhile, after two years' siege, Nineveh fell in 607, and the Assyrian Empire was divided between the Chaldeans and the Medes. It has been said that "the whole history of the world shows no catastrophe equal to the destruction of the Assyrian Empire; no nation was ever so completely destroyed as the Assyrian—a just retribution for the abominations which it had perpetrated for centuries."

But the fall of this hoary tyranny meant no respite for Judah. He continued to be ground as a seed of corn between millstones. Having taken Nineveh, Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to oppose Necho, who after the battle of Megiddo had marched northward to the Euphrates. And there at Carchemish in 605 one of the decisive battles of antiquity was fought, and Necho was utterly routed and fled to Egypt. This sealed the fate of Syria and Palestine, and by 601 Jehoiakim became vassal to the new King Nebuchadnezzar. Assyrian rule therefore was but exchanged for Babylonian. But the latter was to make itself more cruelly felt even than the former. The penalty for a revolt of Jehoiakim from Babylon in 597 fell on his son Jehoiachin: "At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came unto the city, while his servants were besieging it; and Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his princes and his officers: and the king of

Babylon took him. . . . And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon . . . and all the men of might, even seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths a thousand, all of them strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon" (2 Kings xxiv. 10 ff.). This was the first instalment of the great exile or captivity. It is probable that Ezekiel the prophet was among the batch of captives.

But there was more yet to come. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah the uncle of the captive king to rule over the remnant of people left in Jerusalem and Judah. But after nine years Zedekiah, in defiance of the advice of Jeremiah (who remained in Jerusalem), fell to plotting rebellion against Babylon, relying the while on the support of Hophra, Necho's successor in Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar's action was swift and resolute. He at once invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem. Then followed an eighteen months' siege and, after suffering horrors from famine, in 586 Jerusalem fell. "So the city was besieged . . . and the famine was sore in the city, so there was no bread for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden,

and the king went by the way of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon" (2 Kings xxv. 2-7). This was followed by the destruction of Jerusalem and the second captivity. The captain of Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard, Nebuzar-adan, was sent to do the work of destruction. "He burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burnt he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about. And the residue of the people that were left in the city . . . did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away captive. But the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen" (2 Kings xxv. 8 ff.).

The moral is drawn by the writer in exile who brought the Deuteronomic annals of the kings up to date. "Through the anger of the Lord did it come to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he cast them out from his presence" (2 Kings xxiv. 20).

A little remains still to be told. Over the

miserable remnant left in Judah Gedaliah was appointed governor, with his headquarters at Mizpah. But within two months he was assassinated by Ishmael, a member of the royal house in intrigue with the king of Ammon, who hoped to annex a portion of Judæa. A massacre of Gedaliah's supporters ensued, and this was followed by a general exodus into Egypt. The emigrants settled at Tahpanes on the delta of the Nile. It is there that we have our last sight of the heroic Jeremiah still and to the last maintaining his protest against the religious infidelity of his fellow-Jews: and there, according to tradition, he was martyred. We shall try in the next chapter to look at the history we have narrated through his eyes.

What a fiery pit of history it is into which we have looked! A smoke goes up from it as the smoke of a furnace. As a great teacher has written: "It is appalling merely to let the imagination faintly recollect the multitudinous hosts that sweep hither and thither in endless battles across the scenes of those old stories, the fragments of which we find scattered up and down the pages of the Old Testament; stories in which all the slaughters and destructions of Jerusalem must have formed but brief samples of the work that was continually proceeding; stories whose frightful vastness still astounds us, as it reflects its terror in the long lines carved or drawn on the memorial palaces of Nineveh and Babylon. Line upon line of soldiers marching in eternal wars; line upon

line of captains pointing ever forward from their advancing chariots to new scenes of carnage; line upon line of captives—men, women and children—dragged weeping in chains from home to desolate exile; line upon line of tortured prisoners, of massacred populations, of sacked cities, of bloody and remorseless victories." [1]

Truly it is a seven-times-heated furnace in which the precious metal of the faith of Israel was smelted. The Old Testament we see, once again, is far from being so much literature, whether sacred or secular. It is the story of the human travail, agony and aspiration in and through which the living God, in His infinite patience, seeks and finds the way to utter and reveal Himself.

[1] H. S. Holland, *Logic and Life*, p. 72.

CHAPTER X

JEREMIAH

We are allowed to look at the last act in the great drama of the decline and fall of the Jewish monarchy through the eyes of a great man, at once an actor in and a spectator of the drama. Born in the reign of the wicked King Manasseh, Jeremiah lived right through to the days when the flower of his people were captives in Babylon, and he was one among the fugitives who found sanctuary in Egypt. He was called as a young man to his prophetic ministry: "The word of the Lord came unto me saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I: Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jer. i. 4-8).

He was of priestly family, with his home at Anathoth in the tribe of Benjamin. His early ministry was contemporary with the reign of the

good and reforming King Josiah. It is probable that he lent his support to the Deuteronomic reform. For "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord" said, "Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed be the man that heareth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice and do them according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: that I may establish the oath which I sware unto your fathers to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then answered I and said, Amen, O Lord" (xi. 1-5). But it is probable also that Jeremiah saw that the ecclesiastical reformation would not achieve the requisite moral reformation, and that it amounted to an attempt to "heal the hurt of the daughter of my people lightly, saying Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (viii. 11).

At any rate Jeremiah saw the quiet stream of Josiah's reign break into rapid and cataract. He lived through the shaking world-crisis of Assyria's collapse, into which—as we have seen—Josiah was drawn with fatal results. And when nerveless and feeble men succeeded to Josiah, he saw all things tending to the doom of Jerusalem. He had a tender word of sorrow for Jehoahaz, who was only allowed to reign for three months after

Josiah before Pharaoh-necho made him an exile in Egypt: "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the Lord, touching Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place: He shall not return thither any more: but in the place whither they have led him captive, there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more" (xxii. 10-12).

But for Jehoiakim, who replaced Jehoahaz, Jeremiah has nothing but scathing denunciation. He is to him a Nero fiddling while Rome burns—"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that useth his neighbour's service without wages and giveth him not his hire; that saith, I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou strivest to excel in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink and do judgment and justice? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy: then it was well. Was not this to know me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression and for violence, to do it. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, King of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my

brother! or, Ah sister! They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (xxii. 13-19).

It was, indeed, a tremendous ministry to which Jeremiah was called. He had to stand out, at danger to his life, and in a terrible loneliness, against his people and age. Disallowed to marry (xvi. 1), at variance with his family (xii. 6), now imprisoned in the stocks (xx. 2), now flung into a dungeon and left to die and only rescued by a friendly official (xxxviii.)—such are the typical circumstances of the ministry of this most human preacher of righteousness.

The anguish and heat of his soul breaks out ever and again, in a fashion which makes parts of the book of Jeremiah the most human document in the Old Testament. Sometimes it is to bewail his lot: "Woe is me, my mother, that thou has borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have not lent on usury; neither have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me" (xv. 10). Sometimes it is in misery for the fate of his nation: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men: that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men" (ix. 1, 2).

Sometimes it is in daring protest against and challenge of God's justice. Here he strikes a note which rings with increasing loudness in the times which followed upon his. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet would I reason the cause with thee: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore all they at ease that deal very treacherously?" (xii. 1). Sometimes it is in very humanly vindictive cursing of his enemies: "But, O Lord of hosts, that judgeth righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause . . . O Lord, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and avenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy long-suffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered reproach. . . . Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? For they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy fury from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and give them over to the power of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows, and let their men be slain of death, and their young men smitten of the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, Lord, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me; forgive not their iniquity,

neither blot out their sin from thy sight ; but let them be overthrown before thee : deal thou with them in the time of thy anger " (xi. 20, xv. 15 ; xviii. 19-23).

Yet there is more than vindictiveness in these agonized cries : there is the loyalty of this lonely man to God, whose name is " the Lord our Righteousness " (xxiii. 6).

The chief element in what may truly be called the long martyrdom of Jeremiah is that he was constrained to stand against his fellow-countrymen in a fashion which they could not but think to be unpatriotic. He is under divine compulsion and cannot help himself. " O Lord . . . thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed : I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me. . . . And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain." For " mine heart within me is broken, all my bones shake ; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome ; because of the Lord, and because of his holy words " (xx. 7-9 ; xxiii. 9). Nothing can be more authentic than this testimony of this deeply-tried soul to the compulsive reality of the Spirit of God. " Is not my word like as fire ? saith the Lord ; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ? " (xxiii. 29).

Thus it was given to Jeremiah to see through the confidence of the people of his time, according

to which they were convinced that, come what might, Zion and its temple were inviolable. This was the confidence which the great deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib had engendered. It implied a necessary local relationship between God and His people which iniquity could not break. But the prophet's vision goes beyond this still primitively religious morality. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. . . . Behold ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. . . . Thus saith the Lord: Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, neither shed innocent blood in this place. . . . But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation" (vii. 3-8, xxii. 3-5).

It is burnt into the soul of Jeremiah that his people are incorrigible. He writhes in sympathy with them. "Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow! My heart is faint within me. Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people. . . . Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I am

mourning: astonishment hath taken hold on me" (viii. 18-21). But his sympathy does not blind him to the sure arrival of divine judgment. He sees in the menace of Babylon the hand of God. "For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the Lord. They have denied the Lord, and said, It is not he: neither shall evil come upon us. Wherefore thus saith the Lord . . . Lo I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation . . . their quiver is an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men" (v. 11, 15, 16).

Thus Jeremiah stood out alone in a sublime anti-patriotism: he draws down upon himself vehement hatred on the ground that "he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in his city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people but the hurt" (xxxviii. 4). With a grandly staunch courage and consistency he advises submission to Babylon: and even after the fall of Jerusalem he writes to the captives that they should "seek the peace of the city whither the Lord hath caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace" (xxix. 7). He sees that the future lies with the captives in Babylon rather than with those left behind: and he announces their deliverance from exile after seventy years' captivity: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Like these

good figs, so will I regard the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them and not pull them down: and I will plant them and not pluck them up" (xxix. 10; xxiv. 5, 6).

For Jeremiah saw that there was truth about God, which His people would never learn save by the experience of being uprooted from local, tribal, ancestral associations. He welcomed therefore the plunging of his nation into the furnace of affliction, for it was thus that he saw their faith would be tempered anew. He saw that faith in God who had acted in the past would be transformed into conviction as to His present reality. So he cried: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, As the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt: but, As the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the countries whither he had driven them" (xvi. 14, 15). He had the vision of a faith in God expanded at last from tribal limitation to a universal range: and he anticipates the final learning of the double lesson that God is not only the God of his people but of all the earth; that He cares not only for the nation but for the individual within the nation (iii. 16; xxxi. 29).

Thus we reach the greatest word which it was given to Jeremiah to utter in all his long ministry.

It is the word which is nothing less than the key to the whole story of the divine education of Israel. It is instinct with the sense that only through prolonged and successive stages of experience was the reality of the name of God brought home to the souls of men. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more" (xxxi. 31-34).

Here we are at the very heart of the Old Testament, viewed, not as so much literalism, but as the record of experience. In Jeremiah we take hold of a man who, of all the great teachers of Israel, is most indubitably compact of our flesh and blood. "In him," as has been well said, "religion became individual, spiritual, intimate, warm with the life-blood of a loving and sym-

pathetic heart."[1] And it was given to him to see and to declare that there was more truth to break out from the living God, and that truth—in one word, monotheism—would, only by processes of bitter experience, be written on the hearts and consciences of living men. With deep insight he penetrated to the very essence of religion, which is the intercourse of the souls of men with the one reality, the living God.

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 475.

CHAPTER XI

THE EXILE

Under a twofold stroke Jerusalem fell before the might of imperial Babylon and, as we have seen, the flower of its population was carried into exile. The exiles were taken along the great trunk-road which from time immemorial had connected Egypt with Mesopotamia: the way of the sea, across Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, round Hermon and past Damascus; between the two Lebanons, past Hamath and past Arpad; over the Euphrates at Carchemish or at Tiphsah; and so, turning south, to Chaldea or Mesopotamia proper, the land "in the middle of the rivers." It was a seven-hundred-mile march. "We may form some conception of the aspect of the caravans from the transportations of captives which are figured on the Assyrian monuments. . . . From these it appears as if families were not separated, but marched together. Mules, asses, camels, ox-wagons, and the captives themselves carried goods. Children and women suckling infants were allowed to ride on the wagons. At intervals fully-armed soldiers walked in pairs."[1]

The captives were taken to the very heart of imperial Babylon at the height of its power and

[1] George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. ii. p. 51.

prosperity under its greatest Emperor. "The population (of Mesopotamia) must have been very dense. The triumphal lists of Assyrian conquerors of the land, as well as the rubbish mounds which to-day cover its surface, testify to innumerable villages and towns; while the connecting canals and fortifications, by the making of them and the watching of them, must have filled even the rural districts with the hum and activity of men. Chaldea did not draw all her greatness from herself. There was immense traffic with East and West, between which Babylon lay, for the greater part of antiquity, the world's central market and exchange. The city was practically a port on the Persian Gulf, by canals from which vessels reached her wharves direct from Arabia, India and Africa. Down the Tigris and Euphrates rafts brought the produce of Armenia and the Caucasus; but of greater importance than even these rivers were the roads, which ran from Sardis to Shushan, traversed Media, penetrated Bactria and India, and may be said to have connected the Taxartes and the Ganges with the Nile and the harbours of the Ægean Sea. These roads all crossed Chaldea and met at Babylon. Together with the rivers and ocean highways, they poured upon her markets the traffic of the whole ancient world.

"It was in short the very centre of the world—the most populous and busy region of His earth—to which God sent His people for their exile. The monarch, who transplanted them, was the genius

of Babylonia incarnate. The chief soldier of his generation, Nebuchadnezzar will live in history as one of the greatest builders of all time. But he fought as he built, that he might traffic. His ambition was to turn the trade with India from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, and he thought to effect this by the destruction of Tyre, by the transportation of Arabs and Nabathean merchants to Babylon, and by the deepening and regulation of the river between Babylon and the sea.

"There is no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar carried the Jews to Babylon not only for political reasons, but in order to employ them upon those large works of irrigation and the building of cities, for which his ambition required hosts of labourers. Thus the exiles were planted, neither in military prisons, nor in the comparative isolation of agricultural colonies, but just where Babylonian life was most busy, where they were forced to share and to contribute to it, and could not help feeling the daily infection of their captors' habits. Do not let us forget this. . . . It will explain how the captivity, which God inflicted upon the Jews as a punishment, might become in time a new sin to them, and why, when the day of redemption arrived, so many forgot that their citizenship was in Zion, and clung to the traffic and the offices of Babylon.

"The majority of the exiles appear to have been settled within the city or, as it has been more correctly called, 'the fortified district' of Babylon itself. Their mistress was thus constantly before them, at once their despair and their temptation.

'Lady of Kingdoms,' she lifted herself to heaven from broad wharves and ramparts, by wide flights of stairs and terraces, high walls and hanging gardens, pyramids and towers—so colossal in her buildings, so imperially lavish of space between! No wonder that upon that vast, far-spreading architecture, upon its great squares and between its high portals, guarded by giant bulls, the Jew felt himself, as he expressed it, but a poor *worm*. If, even as they stand in our museums, captured and catalogued, one feels as if one crawled in the presence of the fragments of these striding monsters; with how much more of the feeling of the worm must the abject members of that captive nation have writhed before the face of the city, which carried these monsters as the mere ornaments of her skirts, and rose above all the kingdoms with her strong feet upon the poor and the meek of the earth.

"Ah the despair of it! To see *her* every day so glorious, to be forced to help *her* ceaseless growth —and to think how Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion, lay forsaken in ruins! Yet the despair sometimes gave way to temptation. There was not an outline or horizon visible to the captive Jew, not a figure in the motley crowds in which he moved, but must have fascinated him with the genius of his conquerors. In that level land no mountain, with its witness of God, broke the sky-line; but the work of man was everywhere: curbed and scattered rivers, artificial mounds, buildings of brick, gardens torn from their natural

beds and hung high in air by cunning hands to please the taste of a queen; lavish wealth and force and cleverness, all at the command of one human will. The signature ran across the whole, '*I* have done this and with mine own hand have I gotten me my wealth'; and all the nations of the earth came and acknowledged the signature and worshipped the great city. It was fascinating merely to look on such cleverness, success and self-confidence; and who was the Jew that he, too, should not be drawn with the intoxicated nations to the worship of the glory that filled the horizon? If his eyes rose higher, and from these enchantments of men sought refuge in the heavens above, were not even they also a Babylonian realm? Did not the Chaldean claim the great lights there for his patron gods? Were not the movements of sun, moon and planets the secret of his science? Did not the tyrant believe that the very stars in their courses fought for him? And he was vindicated; he was successful; he did actually rule the world. There seemed to be no escape from the enchantments of this sorceress city, as the prophets called her, and it is not wonderful that so many Jews fell victims to her worldliness and idolatry."[1]

Here is the very pitch of the drama of the Old Testament: all that to human eyes seemed important was in insolent triumph: and the people of God's choice were mere dust under the wheels of the Babylonian juggernaut. Yet by that divine reversal of human judgment which

[1] George Adam Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-56.

is a characteristic of the whole Bible story (*e.g.* " the first shall be last and the last shall be first ") it is to " the worm," to the little people ground as a grain between mighty millstones, that the world turns and will turn, that it may catch its accents of faith in God, compared to which all the towering majesty of imperial Babylon is but so much perishing stage-furniture. If any one seeks to learn whence came that basic faith in one sovereign reality—One God—upon which the Jews built, and upon which the whole of Christianity rests, he must turn to the captives in exile in Babylon. For there in their hearts, their ancestral faith in Jehovah, which in earlier days had been so crudely tribal, was finally expanded and purified, so that it poured at last as finest gold from the furnace of affliction.

For this we turn, need it be said, to the great nameless prophet of the exile: to him whose prophetic poems are to be found in Isaiah, chapter xl. and onwards. There, as nowhere in the whole of human literature, sounds out the soul of man possessed by the reality of the one and ultimate reality, holy, righteous, creative—the One God. " Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the hills in a balance ? Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him ? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and

taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. . . . To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him? . . . Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth above the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. . . . To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and for that he is strong in power, not one is lacking" (Isa. xl. 12-26).

Such—and many others—are the immortal words which reach us from the humiliation of the exile: and it is to throw light on the history which environed and conditioned their utterance that, in the main, archæology has patiently toiled to disinter the remains of proud but mortal, tyrannical but perished, Babylon. Let no one recite the first clause of the Christian Creed, "I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and

invisible," without some sense of wondering gratitude for the way in which its essential truth came home at length to the souls of exiles " by the waters of Babylon."

One vivid picture is left us, which gives an insight into the process of apprehension by man of the reality of God. The prophet is evidently standing in the streets of Babylon; he is a spectator of a religious procession which entails the carrying of idols on the backs of animals. He sees huge lumps loaded on to the backs of the patient beasts, who " give " as a horse will " give " in the hindquarters when mounted by a heavy man. He sees the spectacle of divinities laboriously lifted, and carried in nodding and ludicrous impotence. So he cries, " Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: the things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast." And then there breaks in on his soul the contrasting reality of God, maker and bearer of men: " Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which have been borne by me from the belly, which have been carried from the womb: and even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made and I will bear; yea I will carry, and will deliver " (Isa. xlvi. 1-4).

Thus the monstrous phantasmagoria of Babylonish idolatry passes into dishonoured oblivion: but the utterance of the Jew-spectator will resound while the world lasts.

CHAPTER XII

EZEKIEL

The chief outcome of the exile was a purified faith in One God. Of that faith the wonderful spokesman is the nameless prophet-poet, whose writings appear in the second part of the Book of Isaiah.

But before dwelling further upon him, it is necessary to turn back to appreciate another great figure, as great as, but very different from, Jeremiah on the one hand, and the second Isaiah on the other. It is the priest-prophet Ezekiel. A closer attention is due to him than has commonly been paid. For many Bible-readers have been repelled from intimacy with the Book of Ezekiel, partly by the fantasy and complexity of his visions, partly by the violence and offensiveness of his imagery of denunciation, partly by his priestly devotion to legal and ceremonial institutions. Yet to any one who surmounts this initial sense of repulsion, the vision is vouchsafed of a truly great and heroic man, who remains courageous and unshaken amid the shaking of all things, who was as gold unconsumed by the furnace of affliction.

Ezekiel was a priest who, at the age of twenty-

five, was carried into exile along with King Jehoiachin and the flower of the population of Jerusalem, by King Nebuchadnezzar at the First Captivity in 597. He was thus a younger contemporary of the great Jeremiah. But while the older man was left to stand, while all else reeled, in Jerusalem, the younger man was called to his ministry in Mesopotamia among his fellow-exiles. There, in the fifth year of his captivity, and at the age of thirty, the call came to him—" in the land of the Chaldeans, by the river Chebar ; the hand of the Lord was there upon him " (Ezek. i. 3). Setting aside as impenetrable to our minds the intricate imagery of his vision of God (imagery drawn, it is said, from the architecture of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the mongrel figures of Babylonian art), we apprehend the very definite calling and sending of the young exile to a difficult, if not desperate, ministry : " And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet ; and I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to nations that are rebellious, which have rebelled against me : they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this day. And the children are impudent and stiff-hearted ; I do send thee unto them : and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious

house), yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house" (Ezek. ii. 1-6). Thus he was made a "Watchman unto the house of Israel" (iii. 17).

It was an almost desperate mission. For the atmosphere which he had to breathe was thick with despair and delusion. The times of catastrophe had overwhelmed faith in the God of Israel. For faith in Him had been confuted by events. The glowing promises and guarantees of Deuteronomy appeared to have been falsified. Jehovah had failed to vindicate His name and to keep inviolate His holy city. His was a name of impotence. Hence the dismal cries rang out. As from Jerusalem out of "the chambers of imagery" dark with evil rites "for they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the land" (viii. 12; cf. ix. 9): or from the exiles in Chaldea: "Behold, they say, our bones are dried up and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off . . . our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we pine away in them; how then should we live?" (xxxvii. 11; xxxiii. 10).

Out of this despair sprang, as so often before and since, a frantic going after other gods. In exile there was the attraction of the victorious Babylonian deities. Thus Ezekiel finds himself among

men, some of whom had separated themselves from the Lord and "taken their idols into their heart" (xiv. 3, 7). But during the early days of his ministry, until the final fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the flail of his denunciations fell mostly on the apostasy of the Jews still remaining in Jerusalem (chaps. i. to xxv.). Communication passed between Jerusalem and the exiles. Ezekiel may well have received information about Jerusalem from Jeremiah. For we know that Jeremiah sent messages to the Jews in exile (see Jer. xxix. and li. 59 ff.). But Ezekiel seems to have had his own knowledge by second-sight of renewed religious infidelity into which, under pain and disappointment, the people of Jerusalem fell. The cult which attracted them was Egyptian sun-worship. . . . "As I sat in my house, the hand of the Lord fell upon me . . . and he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by the lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem. . . . And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five-and-twenty men, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east" (viii. 1-3, 16).

Deeper depths of abomination are depicted by the prophet in his terrible sixteenth chapter—a frenzied licentiousness and even human sacrifice.

. . . " Thou hast slain my children and delivered them up in causing them to pass through the fire " (xvi. 21 ; cf. xx. 31). Despair, again, took the form of apathy and of disbelief in the fulfilment of prophecy. The " proverb " circulated that " The days are prolonged and every vision faileth " (xii. 22). Loud voices, too, were raised to drown the prophet's message : for he was flanked by false prophets " that see vanity, and that divine lies . . . saying, Peace, and there is no peace," that promised a speedy return from captivity and that Jerusalem would not fall (Ezek. xiii. 9 f. and Jer. xxix. 8 ff.).

But the prophet, both in word and in acted parable (chap. iv.), remained staunch to his mission, which was to declare the full accomplishment of divine judgment upon Jerusalem. Bereaved of his wife—the desire of his eyes taken from him with a stroke—his loss is made to enforce his testimony that God would profane the sanctuary of Israel, the pride of its power, the desire of its eyes (xxiv. 15 ff.). With vision, as clear as Jeremiah's, he sees that nothing but the purifying of uttermost disaster will cleanse the nation. He knows that the future lies not with the saving of the old order of things, nor with the inviolability of Jerusalem, but with a remnant chastened and purged by captivity, and so possessed of a new heart of faith and obedience.

Thus he reduplicates the supreme message of Jeremiah—the promise of hearts renewed inwardly in loyalty to God ; " Thus saith the Lord God :

Whereas I have removed them far off among the nations, and whereas I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they are come. . . . And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you ; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh : that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them : and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way upon their heads, saith the Lord God (xi. 16 ff. ; cf. xxxvi. 25 ff. and Jer. xxxi. 31 ff.).

Once again we are at the very heart of the divine process of the education of Israel. It is something not dictated in a book, but engraven on the quivering tissues of human hearts.

Thus beams of light shine through the darkness of doom which the prophet denounces upon Jerusalem. And, once the news had come through " one that had escaped out of Jerusalem " that " The city is smitten " (xxxiii. 21), the prophet's words vibrate with trumpet-tones of hope and the promise of restoration. The despised, the reviled, the abandoned name of God is to be manifestly vindicated in the issuing from captivity, as gold from the fire, of a holy people : " I will sanctify my great name, which hath been profaned among the nations, which ye have profaned in the midst of them ; and the

nations shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you" (xxxvi. 23-25).

So we are brought to the most famous passage in the prophet's writings—to the resurrection vision of the dry bones in the midst of the valley.[1] . . . "Then said He unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; and we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people; and will bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, and caused you to come up out of your graves, O my people. And I will put

[1] We may conjecture that the bones were actually seen by the prophet when crossing some old battle-field.

my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land: and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord" (xxxvii. 9 ff.).

A very notable element in the hope of Ezekiel was his apprehension of the truth of individual responsibility. Belief in God and belief in man are ever in concomitance. The deeper insight into the meaning of the Name of God, which was the great fruit of the chastening experience of exile, was accompanied by a deeper insight into the value of individual human beings. It would be untrue to say that the truths of One God and of man, individually precious in His sight, were entirely new discoveries attained in captivity. Yet it is evident that both in regard to its outlook upon God and upon man, the mind of Israel was prone to a certain tribal limitation, which was corrigible by nothing less than the uprooting of the exile. Nothing but a clean cut through the association of Jehovah's name with one place and one sanctuary, could suffice to lift Israel from the level of a practical belief in Jehovah as one among other gods, to the level—the level of the teaching of the prophets from Amos onwards—of belief in Him as the one, the only God. And only the force of sheer disaster to the nation (or tribe) and to its central sanctuary, sufficed to bring home the value of the individual, and the consequent possibilities of a personal sanctity, with depths within it deeper than the level of a predominantly tribal cult.

Here are facts of immense interest and significance, which spring to light when once the Old Testament is rescued from the literalism which smooths all its parts to one dead level, and is seen to be the story of a progressive unveiling of truth.

Hope, then, sprang up for Ezekiel through the realization that, though the nation as nation might pass under doom, its destiny would survive in the lives of a penitent remnant. For he saw that the individual was not absolutely merged in the nation or tribe: that therefore the sentence of death upon the nation did not obliterate hope for the individual. The despair of his times was partly made up of dismay over national catastrophe. A certain race-fatalism was abroad, which interpreted the removal of the traditional national and corporate landmarks as signs of final ruin. Into the face of such fatalism Ezekiel threw the faith in the possibility of new beginnings and of recovery through the repentance and changed heart of the individual. The word of the Lord came unto him saying: "What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right . . . he shall surely live, saith the

Lord God" (xviii. 1-9). Thus where others saw death and ending and the falling of all under pitiless doom, Ezekiel saw life and beginning and new hope for all who would turn from sin to repentance. And this insight threw light for him upon the problem of divine justice, and enabled him to stand up to those who complained that "The way of the Lord is not equal (that is, just or fair). Hear now, O house of Israel: Is not my way equal, are not your ways unequal? When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, and dieth therein; in his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. . . . Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, wherein ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart, and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live" (xviii. 25 ff.).

There is doubtless a certain bias of reaction in this, a certain exaggeration of the possibilities of individual freedom, a slurring over of the limitations of such freedom by the factors of heredity and environment and by the facts of the individual's own past. "Make you a new heart and a new spirit" is too great an exaction to be laid upon man

bound in the impotence of sinfulness. But that only means that the teaching of Ezekiel does not attain to finality. There was more to come to amplify it and make it practicable. Yet it represents, we cannot doubt, a signal moment in man's spiritual history. The glory of human freedom breaks through here in prophetic power. Hope springs most marvellously out of the bondage of captivity.

Of the greatness and significance, then, of Ezekiel, we ought to be fully aware. He is in the foremost rank of the saviours of Israel. We shall recur to him again to appreciate the vital contribution which he made to the constitution of the restored community. It is to be found in the last section of his writings, chapters xl. to the end.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OUTCOME OF THE EXILE

For nearly forty years after the final fall of Jerusalem, the discipline of Israel in exile remained unmitigated by any tokens promising release. Babylon towered above the captives in secure and arrogant supremacy. "For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, None seeth me; thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee: and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and there is none else beside me" (Isa. xlvii. 10). The generation of adults, who had lived in and known Jerusalem in the days before the cataclysm, was in disappearance. To younger people the circumstances of captivity were becoming habitual. The danger of the extinction of the nation by absorption into Babylonia was acute. Little wonder that voices of hopelessness and despondency were heard in the darkness. "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed away from my God . . . Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me" (xl. 27; xlix. 14).

It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of this rigorous process of discipline. It meant for Israel a stripping bare, and a plunging into deep waters in which it had to swim or sink. The solid

and comfortable securities which had buttressed national religion in Jerusalem had been swept away. The guarantees of an ancient monarchical constitution had been broken up. The landmarks of an institutional religion, strong in memories of the past and in the familiar associations of locality, had been moved out of place. The very life of the nation, thus, was reduced to its elements. Its essential destiny was thrown into the melting-pot.

Hence the determination with which a remnant of the people, driven on by the instinct of self-preservation, worked to counteract the forces of dissolution and the threat of extinction. The long years of exile were marked by a great deal of literary activity. There are many signs that the existing records of the past, written before and at the time of the Deuteronomic Reform, were reviewed and made to tell effectively on the minds of the captives. The whole chequered story of the monarchy was completed and passed in review, meditated upon and made to tell its moral anew. The ever-recurrent spiritual infidelity of previous generations was pilloried and turned to account, by those who sought to explain the fate which had fallen on the nation.

Nothing better illustrates this method of "writing history backwards," so that it becomes a telling sermon for later generations, than the account, as we have it in the First Book of the Kings, of the building and dedication of Solomon's Temple. Exilic experience deeply colours the account. "But if ye shall turn away from follow-

ing me, ye or your children, and not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but shall go and serve other gods, and worship them : then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given thee ; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight ; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all peoples : and though this house be so high, yet shall every one that passeth by it be astonished, and shall hiss ; and they shall say, Why hath the Lord done this unto this land, and to this house ? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the Lord their God, which brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them : therefore hath the Lord brought all this evil upon them " (1 Kings ix. 6-9).

The homiletic interest and aim of the compilers and writers in exile, is still more plain in the Prayer of Solomon : " If thy people sin against thee (for there is no man that sinneth not), and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captive unto the land of the enemy, far off or near ; yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn again, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captive, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have dealt wickedly ; if they return unto thee with all their soul in the land of their enemies, which carried them captive, and pray unto thee toward their land,

which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name : then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and maintain their cause ; and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee ; and give them compassion before those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them" (1 Kings viii. 46-50). We can see with our mind's eye a preacher and his congregation before him in exile, and realize the force with which these words would tell upon those who heard them.

Perhaps the most obvious instance of *ex-post-facto* comment upon previous records, made from the standpoint of exile, is to be found in 2 Kings xvii. 18 ff. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel (the northern kingdom), and removed them out of his sight : and there was none left, but the tribe of Judah only." Then are inserted two verses which interrupt the narrative : "Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he cast them out of his sight."

A number of the Psalms also are representative of this literary effort to preserve the national identity. They come from the souls of pious patriots, who muse upon God's works and draw out the lessons of His dealings with His people.

Such is Psalm cvi., which clearly shows its exilic origin. "Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them over to the hand of the heathen: and they that hated them were lords over them. . . . Nevertheless, when he saw their adversity: he heard their complaint. He thought upon his covenant, and pitied them, according unto the multitude of his mercies: yea, he made all those that led them away captive to pity them. Deliver us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen: that we may give thanks unto thy holy name, and make our boast of thy praise" (Ps. cvi. 40-45; cf. Ps. lxxviii.).

Other Psalms are the expression of a casting about for reassurance by individual souls in anguish. They represent that forging in the fires of affliction of the metal of a religion, more heart-held and personal than was common in the days when the temple and its traditional institutions were uninterrupted. With temple in ruins and sacrificial rites in abeyance, some sensitive souls were driven out to explore the deeps of experience, to offer to God the sacrifices of troubled spirits, to find tokens of the reality of God in the temple of their own souls. Hence spring some of the great expressions of faith at odds with a dark and bitter experience. "I will cry unto God with my voice: even unto God will I cry with my voice and he shall hearken unto me. . . . I remember God and am disquieted: I complain and my

spirit is overwhelmed. Thou withholdest sleep from mine eyes: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old: and the years that are past. I call to remembrance my song (which I sang in former days of happiness): and in the night I commune with mine own heart, and search out my spirit. Will the Lord absent himself for ever: and is his promise come utterly to an end for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious: and will he shut up his lovingkindness in displeasure? And I said, It is mine own infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most highest" (Ps. lxxvii. 1-10). "O God, wherefore art thou absent from me so long: why is thy wrath so hot against the sheep of thy pasture? O think upon thy congregation: whom thou hast purchased and redeemed of old. We see not our tokens, there is not one prophet more: no, not one is there among us that understandeth any more. . . . O God, how long shall the adversary do this dishonour: how long shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?" (Ps. lxxiv. 1-2, 10-11). "Thus"—as another troubled soul declares—"my heart was grieved: and it went even through my reins." . . . "Nevertheless"—so came the inward personal reassurance—"I am always by thee: for thou hast holden me by my right hand . . . whom have I in heaven but thee: and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee? My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever" (Ps. lxxiii. 21-26).

Thus the literature of religious faith grew. And, further, the exile called out much legal literary activity; in order that the law might be preserved; that such parts of it as had not been written down, but had held sway by the force of unwritten tradition, might be codified; that new law might be framed to meet the circumstances of the passing of monarchy and of the rise of theocracy (ecclesiastical rule).

So the dark night of the exile wore on. But signs of the dawn appear in the rise of another great figure of ancient history—Cyrus, the famous king of Persia. Originally but a prince of the Kingdom of Elam, with its capital at Susa, near the Persian Gulf, he climbed to power over the Medes and Persians (549 B.C.) and became the head of the great Empire which, after defeating the Kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor, and taking Sardis and King Crœsus in 545 B.C. (compare Herodotus and Xenophon), overthrew the Empire of Babylon in 538 B.C.

It is in the early days of the rise of Cyrus that there broke in upon the exiled community, in all its peril of extinction, the tremendous voice of prophetic consolation: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. xl. 1, 2). Here sounds out with majestic power the organ of a renewed faith in God, of a renewed sense of Israel's divine

calling. A winter of perplexity, if not of despair, is succeeded by a spring of assurance and expectation. The great prophet—we know not his name—sees in Cyrus the chosen or the anointed of God. "Who hath raised up one from the east, whom he calleth in righteousness to his foot? . . . I have raised up one from the north and he is come; from the rising of the sun one that calleth upon my name" (xli. 2, 25). "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and will loose the loins of kings. . . . For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my chosen, I have called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (xlv. 1-5). "For I am God and there is none like me . . . saying, My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country; yea, I have spoken, and I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it" (xlvi. 9-11).

Nothing can exceed the force of conviction as to the sovereignty, supremacy and initiative of God, that beats through this Book of Consolation. The sense of God's calling of a people fallen captive in ignominy and impotence, rose anew in multiplied power in the soul of this great messenger of God. He rings out triumphantly the note of divine destiny. Little in the history of religion can match the sheer upward leap of this God-possessed soul from among a people in desperate plight—"a people robbed and spoiled: they are

all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison-houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth: for a spoil and none saith, Restore" (xlii. 22).

He lifts a trumpet voice against insolent tyrannical Babylon: "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for thou shalt no more be called delicate. . . . And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever: so that thou dost not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst thou remember the latter end thereof. . . Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from the things that shall come upon thee" (Isa. xlvii. 1-13).

And he rallies his own people from the depths of despondency: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed away from my God. Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be

weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint" (xl. 27-31).

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECOND ISAIAH

It is right to dwell in greater detail on the writings of the great prophet of the exile, which are to be found in Isaiah, chap. xl. and onwards. For in no other part of the Old Testament is the track more plain, which leads on to Jesus Christ. Here are heights than which only the culminating summit is higher. The heights seem to lead straight on to the summit, with no valley in between. Yet, as we shall see, a descent has to be made from those heights, into the low ground —into the long centuries which intervene between the exile and the coming of the Christ.

The chapters fall into three sections :—(*a*) xl. to xlviii. ; (*b*) xlix. to lv. ; (*c*) lvi. to lxvi.

(*a*) Chaps. xl. to xlviii.—In these chapters the prophet proclaims the renewal of Israel's calling by God to be His servant. He sees the one God in control of contemporary history and Cyrus as His chosen instrument to set the captives free. Here the nation as a whole is the servant of the Lord. The prophet's words vibrate with conviction as to Israel's divine calling. He is possessed by the sense of God's initiative and purpose. "But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have

chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend; thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away; fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (xli. 8-10).

The purpose of God through the servant-nation includes the whole of mankind. The particular election of one people is a means to an end which embraces all nations. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold: my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. . . . He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth. . . . I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (xlii. 1-6). Here are the roots of Catholicism—the Gospel for all.

Yet the prophet sees an insensibility to the calling of God in many members of the servant-nation. There are incorrigible elements in Israel, who learn nothing from the experience of exile. "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf as my messenger that I send? . . . Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robber? Did not

the Lord? He against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he poured upon him the fury of his anger and the strength of battle, and it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart" (xlii. 18-19, 24-25; cf. xlviii. 1-11). Nevertheless God will accomplish His will. "For mine own sake, for mine own sake will I do it: for how should my name be profaned? and my glory will I not give to another. . . . Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob" (xlviii. 11, 20).

(*b*) Chaps. xlix. to lv.—In these chapters the servant of God is no longer the nation as a whole, but a remnant or even an individual within it—an Israel within Israel. Thus is the calling of the servant described:—"The Lord hath called me from my womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name: and he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me; and he hath made me a polished shaft, in his quiver hath he kept me close: and he said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel in whom I will be glorified" (xlix. 1-3). Again emphasis is laid on the universality of the purpose for which the servant is chosen. "And now saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring

Jacob again to him, and that Israel be gathered unto him. . . . Yea, he saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (xlix. 5, 6).

The prophet knows that the accomplishment of his calling by the servant will mean martyrdom. His own experience as prophet amid a people blind and deaf seems to colour his words: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (l. 4-7). Thus the prophet addresses a faithful minority amid a general apostasy. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant? . . . Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged" (l. 10; li. 1). For the purpose of God does not depend upon numbers: "Look unto Abraham

your father, and unto Sarah that bare you : for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many " (li. 2).

So we come to the climax of all the passages that have to do with the servant of the Lord. It is given to the prophet to see depths of meaning in the sufferings of the martyr-servant. In sacrificial obedience the servant suffers for others : through his submission the divine purpose is accomplished. The sufferings, if viewed—as I am sure they should be—as those of an individual, recall the experience of Jeremiah, the faithful and lonely witness among a faithless people. They have also been understood as being those of the faithful remnant within Israel, suffering for mankind. In the common estimation this suffering is a scandal, a penal sign of divine disfavour. Thus the servant was despised and rejected of men, " a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief : and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not " (liii. 3). Yet this conventional verdict upon suffering is wrong. For the servant's sufferings are for others and are redemptive. " Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted " (liii. 4). By his patient, innocent submission—" as a lamb that is led to the slaughter "—the servant does homage to the righteousness of God, and in him the purpose of God is fulfilled : " the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand " (liii. 7, 10).

Thus the dark depths of suffering are lit up from within by the light of sacrifice, and fruitfulness is seen to be where all seemed barren. The will of God prevails. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (lv. 9-11).

We have considered the great vision of the suffering servant historically, as seeming only to have contemporary significance. But Christian minds can never rest satisfied merely with this view. To them the prophet speaks of things greater than he knew. Here as nowhere else the Old Testament anticipates and reaches the level of the New. Here it even touches the mystery of the Cross. Here it cries, unknowingly but truly—"See the Christ stand!"

(*c*) Chaps. lvi. to lxvi.—These chapters have given rise to much discussion among scholars. Some contend that they are by a different author from the great prophet of the Exile; and that they represent sermons addressed to the struggling Jewish community in Palestine, during the difficult

and disappointing days following upon the rebuilding of the temple in 520 B.C. Others would derive these chapters from days before the exile. It is probable that the former are in the right. The tone of these chapters is, on the whole, one of disappointment. Chap. lvii. gives a picture of the prevalence of idolatry and religious abomination. By some, it seems, the lessons of the captivity have not been learnt. In their incorrigibility they are unworthy of Him "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (lvii. 15). Chapter lviii. exposes the hollowness of ceremonial fasting if unaccompanied by righteousness of living. "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways: . . . they delight to draw near unto God Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find your own pleasure and oppress all your labourers. Behold, ye fast for strife and contention and to smite with the fist of wickedness. . . . Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" (lviii. 1-6).

Deep disappointment colours chapter lix. The sins of the people obstruct and prevent the purpose of salvation. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your prayers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue muttereth wickedness. None sueth in righteousness, and none pleadeth in truth: they trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. . . . Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth righteousness overtake us: we look for light, but behold darkness; for brightness but we walk in obscurity" (lix. 1-4, 9).

On the other hand in the middle of these gloomy chapters occurs the great vision of Jerusalem radiant in the rising of her new day of glory. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (lx. 1, 2). In chapter lxi. the prophet announces his gospel of coming deliverance, and in chapter lxii. the renewal of wedlock between God and Zion: "For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (lxii. 5). In chapter lxiii. he sees the tremendous

figure of the solitary Champion, who accomplishes salvation alone: but the vision is followed by a dark picture of the conditions which surround him. He broods over "the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us; and the great goodness towards the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses" (lxiii. 7, 8). Yet all the more he is aware of present apostasy: "For we are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment: and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us by means of our iniquities" (lxiv. 6, 7).

As the book ends the distinction becomes more emphatic between the faithful remnant and the faithless and incorrigible. "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts: a people that provoketh me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon bricks, which sit among the groves and lodge in the secret places; which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels. . . . Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my

servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me. But ye that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for Fortune, and that fill up mingled wine unto Destiny; I will destine you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called ye did not answer, when I spake ye did not hear; but ye did that which was evil in mine eyes, and chose that wherein I delighted not" (lxv. 2-4, 8-12).

Thus the bright light of consolation, of vision and of expectation casts dark shadows. Right to the end of the book the great promises of salvation continue. "For thus saith the Lord, Behold I will extend peace to her (Jerusalem) like a river. . . . As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (lxvi. 12, 13). But the promises are accompanied by a sense that salvation inevitably carries with it judgment. The book, which began with words of sheer consolation, ends ominously on the prospect of doom falling on those who reject and separate themselves from God. Here we see the passing over of prophecy to apocalyptic, and the beginnings of a doctrine of "last things" (or Eschatology).

CHAPTER XV

AFTER THE EXILE

It is tempting to stay on the highlands of faith and vision, whither the great prophet of the exile is the guide. "Here," as was said before, "are heights than which only the culminating summit is higher. The heights seem to lead straight on to the summit, with no valley in between. Yet, a descent has to be made from those heights, into the low ground—into the long centuries which intervene between the exile and the coming of the Christ."

After the exile the religion of Israel became more churchly, more priestly and institutional. Israel was a monarchy before the exile, but afterwards it was a theocracy. Nation and Church became one thing, under a system of ecclesiastical government. No doubt there is a sense of bathos in passing from the great poems of the second Isaiah to the details of Levitical Law promulgated by Ezra in 444 B.C. There is a good deal to repel in the legal exclusive Judaism of the centuries after the exile.

But we must remember that we are dealing with a problem of survival. Unquestionably Israel was in grave danger of absorption by Babylon. It was

only a section of the population which came out of exile, while those who did return had the fiercest struggle to retain its identity and to keep intact the precious fruits of the experience of exile. They returned to fight for their existence amongst unsympathetic neighbours, Semites like themselves, their cousins of Edom, Moab, Samaria and so forth—people who had not gone through the purging experience of being uprooted and chastened by exile: people, therefore, unaware of what was required by the holiness of the One God. Under such conditions the survival of the remnant of the true Israel was bound up with the close-knitting of its social system by legal and priestly ordinances. It was no accident that it was given to the priest-prophet Ezekiel to trace, in exile, the foundation lines of the legal and ceremonial code, which was to bind and maintain the little community returned from exile.

Then we must also remember that there were —and are—limitations in prophetic religion, which required supplementing and balancing by the priestly elements of religion. One of the characteristic features of Old Testament religion is the fruitful struggle or tension within it of the prophetic and the priestly elements. It is, I think, plain that man cannot live merely on prophecy. For to live on prophecy is in a great measure to live on poetry, on vision and on protest. The glowing and poetic vision of the prophets, as also the verdicts of their sensitive moral consciences, needed translation into the prose and practice of

law and of cult. Religion survives and continues by being embodied in familiar routine, in ceremonial and institutions. It does so at a great risk —the risk which ever attaches to what is conservative and customary. It is the risk of falling into a rut and of forgetting, amid the lesser things of ritual, the " weightier matters of the law." It is the risk which is felt and countered by the prophetic conscience.

So it was again and again in the history of Israel. The prophets were raised up in the centuries before the exile, to protest against the inadequacy of prevailing cult to the reality of God. Their protest was followed by the exile, which meant an interruption of the old ritual and customs and the filling of some souls and minds with truer and deeper thoughts of God. That apprehension of God had to find expression and application in reformed law and custom. The new sense of the holiness of God was conserved and put into action in a new Code of Holiness. Thus the vessels of organized religion were refashioned to contain and preserve the rich wine of prophetic inspiration.

That this was so was due, under God, to the man in whose person—as with Moses—the law and the prophets met, namely, Ezekiel. There glows through his words the fire of jealousy for the holiness of God. But this is accompanied by a detailed and practical vision of how that holiness is to be honoured and observed by obedience to law and ordinance. This double characteristic of his mind is plain in the great passage : " I will

sanctify my great name, which hath been profaned among the nations, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. xxxvi. 23-27).

Further, the last chapters (xl. to xlviii.) are devoted to the vision of the restored temple and its reformed worship. He anticipates the recurrence of those perils of contamination by Canaanitish religion, which had led in the Deuteronomic reform to the Law of the Central Sanctuary. So he makes careful provision for the re-establishment of the one Temple where sacrifice was to be offered, to which the "glory of the Lord" would return. It is the place where the Lord "will dwell in the midst of Israel for ever: and the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name" (xliii. 7).

Then the new sanctuary will require, he sees, a reformed priesthood. A distinction has to be made—unknown to Deuteronomy—between the Levites, who had in many cases officiated in

idolatrous rites at the local high places, and the special priestly caste consisting of the descendants of Zadok, whom Solomon appointed head of the priesthood at Jerusalem when Abiathar was deposed (1 Kings ii. 35). So we get the separation by Ezekiel, in the name of the Lord, and for the sake of his holiness, of the Zadokite priesthood. "And the Lord said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary. And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God: O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, in that ye have brought in aliens, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to profane it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and ye have broken my covenant, to add unto all your abominations. And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set them as keepers in my sanctuary. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, No alien, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, or any alien that is among the children of Israel. But the Levites that went far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray from me after their idols; they shall bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers"—doing menial duties—"in my

sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house, and ministering in the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them. Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and became a stumbling-block of iniquity unto the house of Israel; therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near unto me, to execute the office of priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, unto the things that are most holy; but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. Yet will I make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein. But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary, when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me." Then follow details as to the separation and sanctification of the Zadokite priesthood. For it is to be a holy priesthood to "teach my people the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek. xliv. 5-15, 23).

This, it cannot be denied, is a descent from the heights of prophecy. But it is the practical corollary of the prophetic sense of God's holiness. And even in the midst of the wearisome detail of ceremonial purity, the great vision expands in the soul of Ezekiel, both priest and prophet, of the

stream of life-giving waters which shall flow from the heart of the closely-guarded and meticulously sanctified sanctuary (Ezek. xlvii.). We may be impatient with the legal-mindedness of these chapters, but we understand it better if we feel beating through them the fierceness of the struggle that Israel has to endure, with the ever-insurgent heathenism surrounding it. It is good, too, to feel the passion in the heart of the ceremonialist for God, the one and the holy—passion which breaks out in his last words about the restored Jerusalem: "the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there" (xlviii. 35).

In the days after the exile—days of struggle and continual trial—the prophetic and yet priestly vision of Ezekiel was translated into law and embodied in the last main stage of the Law, namely the Levitical. No one can pretend that this stage of the Law is attractive or interesting. The pages of Leviticus are probably the least read of any in the Bible. Yet God fulfils Himself in many ways. Under His hand Levitical law played its part in the safeguarding of the fruits of exile from contamination. The Judaism of the days after the exile is narrow and exclusive: but it was thus that it survived. It had at its heart a flame of pure passion for God. And that flame was alight, centuries after, at the time of the great Coming.

It should never be forgotten how that the first beginnings of the Gospel had their rise at the very heart of priestly, Levitical Judaism. There it was

that was found " a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah, and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they both were righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." There, too, was found Mary the kinswoman of Elisabeth. And there too Simeon, " righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel " : and Anna, " which departed not from the Temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day " (Luke i. 5, 6 ; ii. 25, 37).

Thus, within the hard shell of ecclesiastical law and ordinance, the flame was guarded—the flame of loyalty to God, of faith unabatable, and hope unquenchable, without which, as forerunner, Christianity could never have begun. Thus, not only by prophet, but also by priest, the way was prepared for the Lord.

In this we see one more of the characteristics which make the Old Testament unique, when compared with the story of other religions. The uprising of the prophets within Israel had its parallels in other religions. Every traditional religion has its " critical " periods, when custom and cult handed down from the past are arraigned before the bar of reason and of conscience. This has happened again and again in India in the reform-movements within Hinduism. It happened in specially striking fashion in the story of Greek religion. The great thinkers and tragedians of the Periclean age and after—take Plato and

Euripides as representative names—rounded on the religious tradition of Greece in criticism of it. They brought to the bar of reason and of conscience the gods and goddesses of popular religious tradition. These deities could not survive the trial. The stories of their very human loves were demonstrably unedifying. The conscience of an Euripides or an Æschylus drove them out of court in ignominy and derision. Reformation of the religion of Zeus and Aphrodite proved impossible. And nothing was found as regards the ordinary folk to take its place. The superior people, philosophers and moralists, turned to devise religious systems for themselves. But these systems were eclectic and not for the average man. He was left—as he has been so often left in India—in the hold of the old unreformed, popular cults.

But a striking feature in Israel was the fact that the " critical " prophetic movement did not issue in the overthrow of institutional cult, but in its reformation. No eclectic prophetical religion came into existence for the sake of a few, while the average Jew was left in the clutch of unreformed religion. But the prophetic " criticism " worked purgatively and yet constructively, within the main body of Jewish institutions. The religion of a few thus became the possession of the many. And reformed institutions, a reformed cult or Church system, were the means of employing, applying and carrying on the precious results of the ministry of the prophets. Here, then, we find

renewal and continuance, where in Greece and elsewhere we find breakdown and ending. It is by such comparative estimates that we are brought to acknowledge anew the uniqueness of the religion of Israel.

CHAPTER XVI

THE REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM

We come, next, to the deliverance of the Jews from exile, the rebuilding of the Temple and of the walls of Jerusalem, the resettlement of the nation on the basis which endured until the coming of Christ.

The historical authorities for this period are not good, and it is difficult to be sure of the exact course of events. The chief authorities are the books named Ezra and Nehemiah in the Bible. They form part of a larger work which includes the first and second Books of the Chronicles. The chronicler made his review of Jewish history about 300 B.C., and he wrote with evident ecclesiastical bias. Comparison with the parallel history of the monarchy contained in the books of the Kings makes it plain that the historical value of the work of the Chronicler is not great. On the other hand, it is clear that the Chronicler had before him, as materials for his compilation, memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is mainly on these portions of his work that reliance has to rest for the tracing of the history of the hundred years after the rise of the Persian Empire under Cyrus.

But further light is thrown on the earlier

portion of this period in the books of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets whose office it was to stir up enthusiasm for the rebuilding of the Temple.

Of the main results there is no doubt, firstly, that the rise of Persia, and the absorption by it of Babylon, led to the deliverance of some of the Jewish captives from exile in the middle of the sixth century B.C.; secondly, that by the middle of the fifth century Jerusalem was re-established as a Church-state, and its life ordered by the Levitical law promulgated by Ezra the priest in 444 B.C.

It is also very certain that the hundred years after the exile—and indeed all the centuries before Christ—were times of continued trial and struggle, with little fulfilment in them of the enthusiastic visions of the great prophets. In being delivered from Babylon the captives did not pass to a condition of independence. They had to live under the shadow of Persian authority and, when that authority waned, other successive imperial powers took its place.

Another factor in post-exilic experience was the presence on the flank of the returned captives of hostile relatives and neighbours, whether Jews who had been left behind in Palestine, or the descendants of those who had been settled by the Assyrians in the place of the northern tribes after the fall of Samaria in the eighth century. These last we may call by the general name of Samaritans. If the story of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah is

characterized by intolerance and exclusiveness, it must be remembered that they were engaged in a life-and-death struggle to conserve the lessons of exile, and to prevent the falling back of those purified in Babylon to the lower levels of Semitic religion.

The first return from exile was in 537 B.C., when, according to the Chronicler, 42,360 souls left Babylon by leave of Cyrus, under the leadership of Zerubbabel as civil leader, and of Joshua as priest. The return was marked by the rebuilding of the altar of sacrifice and the laying of the foundation-stone of the new temple (Ezra iii.). But opposition on the part of local adversaries led, it seems, to a suspension of the work for a period of sixteen years (Ezra iv. 1-5). In 520 B.C. the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to urge the completion of the work begun. They did so with such effect that the temple was finished in four years (516 B.C.). The temple was dedicated with great gladness and the Passover was celebrated.

But then a curtain falls which hides from our gaze the history of the next sixty years. The Chronicler leaves an interval between the completion of the temple in 516 B.C. and the arrival from Babylon in 458 B.C. of Ezra, the priest of the line of Aaron, accompanied by another group of exiles. What happened in the interval we can only conjecture. There are indications in the writings of both Haggai and Zechariah that these prophets expected the fall of the Empire of

Persia and the revival of the monarchy in the person of Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiakim, the last king of Judah but one before the exile. Haggai anticipated that the doom pronounced upon Jehoiakim by Jeremiah—"As I live, saith the Lord, though Jehoiakim King of Judah were the signet on my right hand, yet would I pluck thee hence" (Jer. xxii. 24)—would be reversed: "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant . . . and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee" (Hag. ii. 23). (Compare Zech. iii. 8—"I will bring forth my servant the Branch.")

But nothing seems to have come of the revival of monarchy. Some further light is thrown on this period before the arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah by the words of Malachi, the anonymous (for Malachi means angel or messenger) prophet, whose book is misleadingly placed at the end of the Old Testament. He denounced a condition of social injustice, of slackness and perfunctoriness in religion, and of scepticism and disillusionment in faith. "My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye profane it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted, and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. Ye say also, Behold, what a weariness it is! and ye have snuffed at it . . . and ye have brought that which was taken by violence, and the lame and the sick; thus ye bring the offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord" (Mal. i. 11-13). "Ye have wearied the Lord with

your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him ? In that ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them ; or, Where is the God of judgment ? " . . . " Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein have we spoken against thee ? . . . Ye have said, It is vain to serve God : and what profit is it that we have kept his charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts ? And now we call the proud happy ; yea, they that work wickedness are built up ; yea, they tempt God and are delivered " (Mal. ii. 17 ; iii. 13-15).

At any rate it is clear that it fell to two men to take effective measures to counteract the degeneracy of the years which followed upon the rebuilding of the temple. They were Nehemiah the layman, the cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes, and Ezra the priest. It is difficult to determine the relationship between the two men. According to the Chronicler Ezra brought a large number of Jews from Babylon in 458 B.C. (Ezra vii. and viii.). On arrival he set to work to overthrow the marriages with heathen wives contracted by Jewish men (Ezra ix. and x.).

On the other hand Nehemiah did not come from Babylon to Jerusalem till 444 B.C. He was given leave by the king to visit Jerusalem. He tells vividly of his arrival : " So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some men with me ; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do

for Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out right by the valley gate, even towards the dragon's well, and to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down, and the gates thereof consumed with fire. Then I went on to the fountain gate, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook and viewed the wall: and I turned back, and entered by the valley gate and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did: neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles. . . . Then said I unto them, Ye see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire: come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. And I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me: as also of the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work" (Neh. ii. 11-18).

Then follows a dramatic account how the building of the walls was accomplished despite the hostility of enemy neighbours, under the leadership of Sanballat and Tobiah: "they conspired all of them to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion therein. And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish: so that we are not

able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come into the midst of them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease" (Neh. iv. 8-11). But Nehemiah rose to the occasion: "And it came to pass from that time forth, that half of my servants wrought in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows and the coats of mail. . . . And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large and we are separated upon the work, one far from another: in what place soever ye hear the sound of the trumpet resort ye thither unto us; our God shall fight for us. So we wrought in the work; and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us and may labour in the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, each had his weapon in his hand" (Neh. iv. 16, 19-23). Under such conditions and such resolute leadership the wall was finished in fifty-two days, and it was solemnly dedicated (Neh. xii. 27).

Nehemiah's work was not confined to wall-building. He also secured efficiency in the temple worship and in payment of dues, the enforcement of the Sabbath, and measures against mixed marriages with heathen neighbours.

The work of these two men, Ezra and Nehemiah, issued in a solemn promulgation of the Priestly or Levitical Code of the Law, and of a pledging of themselves by the people in a covenant to obey it. "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding. . . . And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until midday . . . and the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for a purpose. . . . And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people (for he was above all the people); and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. . . . And Nehemiah, which was the governor, and Ezra the priest the scribe . . . said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is

prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye grieved; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy: neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (Neh. viii. 1-12).

We see these events through the eyes of the Chronicler compiling his record one hundred and fifty years after their occurrence. But nevertheless it is clear enough that Ezra and Nehemiah mark a clearly defined stage in the story of Israel. A purified Israel was secured; a theocratic government was established: the danger of assimilation by neighbours of debasing religious influence was countered; the nation was organized and disciplined to face the future, and was thus enabled to survive for the fulfilment of its great destiny.

DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN

CHAPTER XVII

GENESIS AND THE PENTATEUCH

We now come to the putting together of the great five-volume book of the law, of which the Greek name is the Pentateuch. This must have taken place after the promulgation by Ezra of the Priestly or Levitical Law in 444 B.C. The Pentateuch is a vast compilation of material which represents many successive stages in the story of Israel. To study it is like driving a shaft in mining through series upon series of strata of rock. It has been well likened to a great cathedral, which enshrines the devotion of centuries, and in which we see parts that are centuries old adjoining other parts of much later date.

We must quite frankly abandon the idea that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. To ascribe the whole book to Moses is as impossible as to assert that the builder of the Saxon crypt in a cathedral was also the architect of its perpendicular chancel. Yet the name of Moses looms large over the whole prolonged story of legal development as the name of the first great prophet, legislator, statesman and nation-maker. "Moses" came to be the title of the ever-accumulating file of "the Law." The strata in the legal pile which carries

us back most nearly to Moses is Exodus xx. to xxiii., which contains the earliest written Laws, including the Decalogue (Ten Commandments), and is called the Book of the Covenant. Yet even here we can touch no absolutely plain and original Mosaic beginning, for the Book of the Covenant discloses many parallelisms with the famous Code of Hammurabi, the great King of Babylonia (2123–2081 B.C.), the details of which were found in 1902 at Susa, engraved on a black stone eight feet high. And on the other hand, the Book of the Covenant presupposes a people settled in Canaan and practising agriculture, and seems therefore not to represent the experience of Israel as a nomad people in the wilderness. Probably the portion of literature which goes back most directly to Moses is the famous victory song in Exodus xv. "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea," etc. It is such snatches of war-ballads that ever live tenaciously in the minds and mouths of successive generations, and they constitute the earliest elements in the conglomerate pile of Jewish literature. (Compare Numbers xxi. 17-18, 27-30.)

We can distinguish four main elements or sources in the Pentateuch. These four sources are known to scholars as J, E, D and P. J and E are the earliest sources, and reach as far as the end of Judges and perhaps farther.

(*a*) The symbol J, as we have seen, has been used because the name of God in this document is

Jehovah. Scholars also have generally agreed that this compilation of early traditions was made in Judea about 900 B.C. J is the great story-teller of the Old Testament. In his document "we find a wealth of picturesque narrative. We find the artistic and poetic touch. We find delicacy, pathos, dignity, human feeling. There is a deep sense of the ethical nature of religion. And J is noted for the anthropomorphic pictures of God which he gives us; his passion to trace back to their beginnings many existing customs, institutions, or facts of life and society, such as the distinction of the sexes, marriage, sin, toil, the wearing of clothing, the gait and habits of the serpent, the subject position of woman, and the pain of child-bearing."

(*b*) The symbol E has been used because the word for the name of God in this document is Elohim. It is thought also that E was compiled in the northern kingdom, and so it has been associated with Ephraim. E is not so vivid as J, but there seems to be in him a more developed sense of progress in religion and revelation, from the time when the early fathers beyond the River were idolaters (Josh. xxiv. 2) and worshipped strange gods (Gen. xxxv. 2-4) to the time of the great prophets. E is generally dated at the eighth or seventh century B.C.

Both writers are full of a sense of a divine purpose in history. They use the material which lay to their hand—the traditions about the patriarchs, the stories about local heroes and famous sites, the annals of war, the songs and

ballads—to illustrate this purpose. It is plain that J and E were combined by some later editor and made into one document. This was probably in the seventh century B.C. The fusing of the two narratives into one makes the task of identifying either a delicate one. A good instance is furnished by Genesis xxxvii., where J represents Joseph as sold by his brethren to Ishmaelites (vv. 25-27), while E tells that he was stolen by Midianites (xl. 15). But in xxxvii. 28, the same verse tells of both the sale and the kidnapping.

(*c*) The third great element in the Pentateuch is Deuteronomy. That represents, as we have seen, the revision of the earlier law, at the time of the Reformation in the reign of Josiah, 621 B.C., in order to enforce the teachings of the great prophets against idolatry.

(*d*) The fourth great element in the Pentateuch is P, or the Priestly document. The whole of Leviticus belongs to this source. It is the latest of the four main sources. It received its initial inspiration from the teaching of Ezekiel, the prophet-priest of the exile. It represents the tremendous endeavour by priestly men to secure the survival of Israel under theocratic rule, and to make it into a holy people, worthy of the one holy God. Scholars specially connect the Law of Holiness (Lev. xvii. to xxvi.) with the influence of Ezekiel. It was the Priestly Law which was promulgated by Ezra in 444 B.C. But P contains more than law. The compilers of P (or some kindred successors to them) constructed a frame-

work into which they fitted the previous layers of history and law. The Pentateuch as we have it (and, when Joshua was added to it, the Hexateuch, or six-volume book) was shaped as a whole by such an editor or editors. They were especially concerned with the institutional, ritual and genealogical aspects of the history of the past. But it must never be forgotten that while we owe to P much that is formal and precise and dry, we also owe to this source the sublime introductory chapter to the whole Pentateuch, namely Genesis i.

Such, in very broad outline, is the account of the compilation of the Pentateuch or Law. It became the first accredited instalment of the Jewish Bible.

The work of scholars in dividing up the Law of Moses into so many elements and stages seems like the unravelling of a neat wool ball and leaving it all in a tangle. But that view is only superficial. Even a slight understanding of the prolonged process of compilation of law and history increases faith in the overruling hand of God in the successive stages of Israel's destiny. That uncertainty surrounds many of the earlier events in the history we see to be in the nature of the case. "The literature upon which we are dependent for our knowledge of the history of the Hebrews from Abraham to Joseph is of a date from nine to eleven hundred years later than the events and personages which it describes."[1] But that matters

[1] Quoted by Chapman and Weatherhead, *The Old Testament and To-day*, p. 31.

little, when we realize that the God, of whom ancient stories and traditions were told, was He whose name was in revelation and verification in the fully historical times of those who compiled the traditions about the past.

It is important to dwell more fully on the meaning and value of the early chapters of Genesis. In the first eleven chapters of Genesis, before the beginning of the great drama of Jewish destiny in the call of Abraham (chap. xii.) we find :

The Creation Stories ;
The Fall in the Garden of Eden ;
The story of Cain and Abel ;
The generations from Adam to Noah ;
The Flood stories ;
The Fall of Noah ;
The descendants of Noah ;
The story of the Tower of Babel ;
The ancestors of Abraham.

Here we have, let it be said at once, not real history or science, but myth and legend used for the communication of spiritual truth. It is a hopeless task to attempt to make history of the stories of the Creation or of the Flood. For instance, in the former there are two accounts of the creation of man ; in the one he is made last of all the creatures, in the other he is made first : in the latter there are two accounts of the Ark ; in the one Noah takes in the animals by sevens, in the other by pairs. And so on.

But if we cannot find history in these chapters,

what have we ? We have, firstly, folk-lore which Israel shared with other Semitic peoples. There is a Creation-Myth in Babylonian mythology which is plainly of the same family as Genesis i. But the remarkable and wonderful thing is that the rather gross and unpleasant original version reappears in Genesis, purged by the force of that pure and unique faith in God, of which Israel at length came to be possessed. We have, secondly, attempted answers to questions about life and experience. " Long before man is capable of either science or history, he asks himself questions to which only science or history can give the correct answers."[1] Hence in all nations we find folk-lore or myth which is prescientific answers to scientific questions, prehistorical answers to historical questions. So among the Jews we can think of them and their forbears wrestling with such questions as—How life came to be ? Why man's toil is so difficult ? Why birth is so painful to mothers ? What is the origin of sex ? Whence come the sense of shame and the wearing of clothes ? Why does the snake alone of all beasts glide legless along the ground ? What is the rainbow ? etc., etc.

Out of such myths, coming down to them from the immemorial past, the Jews of later generations drew material for expressing certain elemental truths about God and man. The truth of the one God, creative and purposive, and the truth of man, the unique and crowning element in creation, made for God and for goodness, and yet ever

[1] George Barclay, *The Making and Meaning of the Bible*, p. 53.

falling from his true estate—these were not always there in the Jewish mind. It required the experience and schooling of many generations for them to come home to it. A sense of the holiness of God had to be developed so as to promote a real concern over the tragedy of sin. Hence there were great convictions at last in existence, which could then be embodied and made familiar in a tale. And—how wonderful !—there were in the national tradition stories, come down from the past, which were capable of being used and modified as vehicles for the convictions. Here tradition moulds experience and experience moulds tradition, in a fashion which heightens and secures our sense of the wonder of the working of God in and through the whole process.

It is a dire mistake to use these chapters as though they contained revealed and final answers to the questions lying behind them. To some of the questions there are no answers. For light on others we must go direct to the Gospel with its centre in the Cross. But they contain the two great foundation elements of Christian theology that have to do with God and man : and, in their proclamation of the fact of the whole complex tragedy of evil, they prepare the way for that action of God, whereby He " reconciled the world unto Himself."

Cancelled from
Gladstone's Library
24 APR 2023
GLADSTONE'S LIBRARY

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ENTRANCE OF THE MODERN WORLD

By the end of the fifth century B.C. the church-nation of post-exilic Judaism was firmly established, with the temple rebuilt, its high priesthood in power, and with the beginnings of the Scriptures in the Book of the Law in its possession. Jerusalem was the centre of a harsh, exclusive, intolerant system of national and ecclesiastical life. But this it had to be if it was to retain its identity, and keep intact its purified faith in the One Holy God, and its verified sense of His destiny for Israel and through Israel for the world. Yet Jerusalem was not the whole of Judaism. For there were Jews scattered far and wide over different parts of the Persian Empire, in Mesopotamia and Syria and in Egypt and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. These were the Jews of the Dispersion, the ancestors of those who played so important a part in the first spread of Christianity. For them Jerusalem was the hearth of their national religion, to it they went on pilgrimage and paid religious tribute. But their religious needs could not, in the nature of the case, be satisfied with the temple system, and it was among them that synagogue-worship, consisting of prayer,

reading of the Scriptures, and exhortation, developed.

But before we pursue the development of Judaism as a religious system or movement, it will be well to glance round on the great world outside the narrow sanctuary of Jewish nationalism at Jerusalem, the great world in the middle of which the Jews of the Dispersion maintained their existence. For the fourth century was marked by the swirling into the world, in which the Jews were a small part, of new currents of life. Greece, and, later, Rome, enter on the stage hitherto occupied by Egypt and the successive Mesopotamian powers. The modern world—for modern civilization derives directly from Greece and Rome—begins. Contemporaneously with the resettlement of the Jews returned from exile at Jerusalem, there were great and creative events in other parts of the world. If our eyes ranged far enough they would descry the contemporary figures (both a little earlier than the rebuilding of Jerusalem) of Buddha in India and Confucius in China. But these figures and the great movements identified with them are probably too remote to bring influence to bear on the Mediterranean world. The more relevant events lie nearer at hand. The turn of the sixth and fifth centuries saw the unfolding of the great drama of the assault upon Europe in the person of the little city states of Greece and pre-eminently of Athens, of the great Oriental empire of Persia. That empire was at its zenith under Darius (521–485 B.C.). It was he

who planned the attack on Greece but it was carried out to its dramatic failure by Xerxes (485–464 B.C.). It is tempting to turn aside to this great epic and to its unforgettable battle-names — Marathon (490 B.C.), Thermopylæ, Salamis, (480 B.C.)—but it must suffice to recommend the reading of the fascinating pages of the first great historian, Herodotus.

Out of the life-and-death struggle with Persia sprang, like a matchless bloom, the glorious spring and summer of classical Greece—the Periclean age. While Ezra and Nehemiah were consolidating the church-nation at Jerusalem, and during the succeeding years, there was in Athens, blazing like a great constellation, the creative group of great thinkers, artists, poets—Socrates, Plato, Æschylus, Sophocles, Praxiteles, Phidias. Our modern civilization has its roots in this unique period.

But the spread of Greek culture beyond Greece was due to the rise of the Greek empire, of which Philip of Macedon (359–336 B.C.) was the prime builder, and Alexander, his son, the shining celebrity. Before Syria and Palestine were overswept, as by great waves, by the armies of Alexander the Great, they were satrapies or provinces in the empire of Persia. But that empire suddenly fell before Alexander at the decisive battles of Issus (332) and Arbela (331) and the Jewish subordination to Persia was exchanged for subordination to Greece.

Not that the empire of Alexander lasted, for he died, aged thirty-three, in 323 B.C., having

carried his conquests as far afield as India. But he powerfully influenced the world of Judaism by his foundation of the city of Alexandria in Egypt, which became the meeting-place of East and West, the centre of exchange between the culture of Greece, the mystic cults of Egypt and the monotheism of Judaism.

Alexander's empire broke into several parts. The two chief segments, and the ones with which the Jews had to do, were the empire of the Ptolemies in Egypt, and the empire of the Seleucids, with its centre at Antioch in Syria. The former was founded by Ptolemy Soter (323–285 B.C.), one of Alexander's generals, who secured for himself the province of Egypt and established a dynasty which lasted for three hundred years. The rule of Ptolemy was extended to Syria, and he occupied Jerusalem in 320 B.C. Palestine remained an Egyptian province till 198 B.C. On the other hand Seleucus, another Greek general of Alexander's, secured the satrapy of Babylonia after the death of Alexander. He founded Antioch as his centre of government, and extended his rule over the greater part of the eastern provinces of Alexander's empire. Among the Seleucids it fell to Antiochus the Great to wrest Palestine from Egypt, and Jerusalem in 198 B.C. fell under the rule of Antioch.

It was through contact with these two empires that Judaism was exposed to the influence of Greek culture. On all sides of Judah there sprang up Greek settlements, and on the other hand,

most notably at Antioch and Alexandria, Jewish colonies flourished. The numbers of Jews in Alexandria came to exceed those in Jerusalem. And there they learnt the Greek language and absorbed Greek thought. It was at Alexandria that the Old Testament Scriptures, beginning with the Pentateuch, which was complete by 250 B.C., were translated into Greek. The importance of this "Septuagint"—the tradition is that the translation was done by a committee of seventy—version was immense. It became the medium whereby the faith of Israel was nourished among the Jews of the Dispersion. It was also the means whereby the riches of Jewish faith and religion circulated among Gentiles. It facilitated the exchange between Greek and Semitic traditions.

But not only were the Jews of the Dispersion brought within the currents of Greek or Hellenic influence, but in Palestine and in Jerusalem itself the same penetration of thought and life went on. Gaza, Samaria, Joppa, became centres of Greek influence. At the beginning of the second century B.C. the Jews were already "compassed and penetrated by influences as subtle as the atmosphere, not as of old uprooted from their fatherland, but with their fatherland itself infected and altered beyond all power of resistance."[1] Nor were these influences merely those of civilization and enlightenment: they also abounded in moral corruption. "The Greeks," an historian says,

[1] George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. p. 445.

" became for the Orient the bearers of civilization indeed, but also the bearers of moral degeneration." [1]

The extent to which the process of Hellenization had gone, and the existence within Jerusalem of a strong pro-Greek party, was made glaringly plain when the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes (175–168 B.C.) made his determined attempt to stamp out the Jewish religion altogether, and to substitute for it a Hellenistic cult. There were elements within Jerusalem that encouraged this endeavour, but in the crisis the majority remained loyal to the religion of their fathers. The unfamiliar pages of the second Book of the Maccabees contain the characteristic stories of the splendidly staunch resistance of Eleazar the Scribe, a man of ninety years of age, to the attempt to make him eat swine's flesh, and of a mother and her seven sons who preferred martyrdom to apostasy (2 Macc. vi. and vii.). The attempt of Antiochus to destroy Judaism was resolute. He sent Apollonius with an army of 20,000 to Jerusalem: " all that was distinctive of Judaism was ordered by a royal decree to be removed; the practice of circumcision, the sacrificial observance of the sanctuary were prohibited; all copies of the Law that could be found were rent in pieces and burned; an altar to Zeus Olympios was erected in the temple courts (" The abomination of desolation "); pagan ceremonies were introduced, and the Jews were compelled on pain of death to

[1] Cornile, *History of the People of Israel*, p. 179.

take part in heathen worship and to eat swine's flesh." [1]

But the king's efforts were defeated by the great Maccabean rising, of which the first leader was Mattathias, an old priest belonging to the Hasmonæan family at Modin. The chief hero, however, of this magnificent instance of national resistance to oppression was Judas Maccabæus, the son of Mattathias. The story in the first book of the Maccabees is epic and one which all should read. The climax of Judas' efforts was the cleansing of the temple (while Syrians still held out in Acra the citadel) in 165 B.C. The memory of this achievement was perpetuated in the Feast of the Dedication (John x. 22).

The threat to religious freedom was defeated, but years of warfare and intrigue followed upon the initial glories of Judas Maccabæus, who fell fighting in 161 B.C. His leadership passed first to his brother Jonathan and then to his brother Simon. It was not till 142 B.C. that the latter had secured the independence of the Jews. By 104 B.C. John Hyrcanus, Simon's son, and Aristobulus, his successor, had extended the borders of the Maccabean kingdom, so that it rivalled in extent those of David and Solomon.

But the Maccabean kingdom fell from its glory. Aristobulus was the first of a line of kings unworthy to fill the places of the great Maccabean leaders. The community was divided into two parties, one those whose ideal of Israel was a

[1] Ottley, *History of the Hebrews*, p. 259.

worldly kingdom upheld by force of arms, and the other—that of the Pharisees or "separated ones"—whose ideal for Israel was a holy commonwealth, to be upheld not by force but by faithful adherence to the Law. The quarrel came to a head in the savage civil war between Alexander Jannæus and the party of the Pharisees.

But it dragged on until appeal was made to the new power which had appeared on the scene—Rome. Pompey was appealed to by the Pharisaic party that he might end the tyranny of the Hasmonæan monarchy, and restore the high priesthood to its former position. Pompey's advance was resisted by Aristobulus II, and this led to a costly siege (63 B.C.), in which it is said that 12,000 Jews perished. Thus Jewish independence, which had lasted for eighty years, came to an end.

But little peace followed for the Jews from being brought under Roman rule, partly because the Romans were not able to make their hold upon Syria secure against the Parthians, partly owing to the civil war (49 B.C.) between Julius Cæsar, Pompey and Crassus. The short-lived supremacy of Julius Cæsar was marked by favour shown to the Jews, for he sanctioned the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem which Pompey had destroyed. But on his assassination (44 B.C.) it fell mainly to Herod the Great, a man of Edomite origin, to pilot Judæa through the troubled times that followed.

Herod secured the support of Antony and

Octavian and through their influence was declared by the Roman Senate King of the Jews (40 B.C.). But it was not till 37 B.C. that, with Roman help, he stormed Jerusalem, executed the last of the Hasmonæan family Antigonus, and so put an end to that once great dynasty. Herod was an astute and determined man who succeeded in doing much in practical ways for his kingdom, despite his unpopularity with the people, to the mass of whom he was "an alien, an Edomite, a friend of the Romans and a heathen at heart." He built new cities like Cæsarea and made Jerusalem a magnificent city. He began the rebuilding of the Temple in lavish style in 20 B.C. It was only at the end of his reign that Judæa was formally annexed to Rome and put under the rule of a Roman procurator (6 B.C.).

Thus amid the thick confusions of history, we approach "the fullness of the times" and the coming of Christ.

CHAPTER XIX

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AFTER THE EXILE

We have traced the external circumstances of Israel during the long centuries which intervened between the exile and the coming of Christ. They make it natural to us to liken Israel to a little vessel tossing on the tumultuous waves of an ocean, or to some cloister surrounded by the traffic and business of a great city. Thus did Israel maintain a life apart amid the rise and fall of empires, Persian, Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Greek, Roman. While at the same time influences from the world outside were borne within the guarded shrine of Israel through the come and go of its children of the Dispersion.

We need now to follow the development of religion and thought within Israel, during the centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. We have seen how the post-exilic community was re-established with the Temple rebuilt, its high priesthood in power, and with the beginnings of the Scriptures in the Book of the Law in its possession. The future of that community was religious. Gone were the days of monarchy and political power. The significance, therefore, of this period lies more than ever in the religious developments, the movements of mind and soul

within the narrow limits of the church-nation, rather than in its external relations to nations outside its borders. At the same time the vehement threat to its religious identity, which produced the Maccabean struggle, meant the revival of political aims, and the re-establishment for a time of a kingdom comparable in extent to that of the glorious days of Solomon.

It is easy—if anyone has an anti-ecclesiastical bias—to look upon the period under review as a mere bathos following upon the creative times of the great prophets, as so many "centuries of silence," during which religion grew more and more formal and intolerant and scribal and pharisaic. Quite true, the period is by comparison less creative and original than the times of the great prophets. It was a period of consolidation, of toughening of a system such as could survive in the recurringly stormy "weather" of contemporary events. To this process of consolidation the presence and authority of the Book of the Law doubtless greatly contributed, with effects both legal and formal and intolerant. This, along with the pressure of the fierce struggle for existence and survival, no doubt bred an unlovely temper of exclusiveness and of hatred of other peoples. This temper finds expression in the little books of Esther and of Judith, and in not a few passages in the Psalms. Yet it is a superficial view, merely to fasten with disapproval on the intolerance of Judaism. If there had not been found in Israel a hard, tough, dogmatic loyalty, bred upon and

nourished by the Law, at the time of the Maccabean crisis, the destiny of the nation would have been cut short and it would have been swallowed up and obliterated by Hellenism.

So we must think of the useful and fruitful effects of the ever-increasing predominance of the Book of the Law, and of the formation, in due course, of a second part of the Canon of Scripture, which was called the Prophets. The Prophets were divided into two parts: (*a*) the Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, and 1st and 2nd Kings; (*b*) the Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets. Both parts, but especially the former, contained great elements which carried back to days long before the exile. For, as we have seen, the stories of the early heroes and of the beginnings of the kingdom were compiled in the J and E documents in the tenth and ninth centuries B.C.; and were then re-used and added to from the standpoint of the Deuteronomic Reform in the reign of King Josiah; and were then again reviewed from the standpoint of the exile. It is interesting that these histories were classed under the headings "the Prophets." It enforces the fact that they consist of history written to enforce the teachings of the great prophets—history, in a word, used to convey a moral. Scholars think they may well have existed, pretty much in the form in which they stand in the Old Testament, before the date of the Samaritan schism, 330 B.C.

The compilation of the Latter Prophets took longer. The process of collecting, arranging and annotating the writings of the prophets continued for two and a half centuries after the Canonization of the Law (probably about 444 B.C.). Prophecies as late as the third century are included in the Latter Prophets. "We may conclude," says a scholar, "with great certainty that the completion of the second division of the Canon dates from the end of the third or the beginning of the second century B.C." [1]

"The Prophets" must have played a great part in nourishing and fortifying and enlightening the soul of Israel during the weary years after the exile. They represent in their historical sections the tenacious hold which the nation kept upon its past, its delight in reciting the wonderful works of God in the days of their fathers, its habit of deriving reassurance for the present from a contemplation of all "the way the Lord their God had led them."

The preservation, on the other hand, of the writings of the great prophets kept alive in the national soul the understanding of how Israel's most precious possession had been given and possessed, namely its pure and passionate faith in the God of all the earth. The prophetic teaching, further, sustained that essential and characteristic thing in Jewish faith, namely its unquenchable optimism, its forward-looking attitude. However dark the present may be, and however disappoint-

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 38.

ing by contrast with the great memories of the past, the future was still open, and thither the great words of the inspired teachers would impel eyes to be lifted, in expectation of the fulfilment of the purpose for which God had laid hold of His people, in expectation of a coming Day and a coming One.

But it would be very misleading to think of this long period as marked merely by its preserving the literature of the past. It was itself productive of literature representative of most important and interesting movements of mind and soul. Within the narrow limits of Judaism and of law-moulded religion, speculation, criticism, inquiry, reflection, were ever astir. Quite true, the authentic voice of prophecy ceased. We get the poignant cry in a Psalm—"We see not our tokens, there is no prophet more, neither is there any among us that understandeth any more" (lxxiv. 9; cf. 1 Macc. iv. 46; ix. 27; xiv. 41). The creative period of prophetic inspiration was closed by a silence not to be broken until the nation-shaking mission of John the Baptist. And yet the spiritual travail of this period yielded results of the first importance, namely the Hagiographa or Writings, without which the Old Testament would be a much lesser university of the soul of man than it is. The Writings consist of eleven books. The Psalms, Proverbs, Job, form one group; the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, form a second; Daniel, Ezra (with Nehemiah) and Chronicles form a third.

Some of these books were not included in the Jewish Canon of Scripture till after the beginning of the Christian era.

The most interesting of these books represent the emergence from within Judaism of a spirit of criticism of prevailing tradition. It may well be that this spirit is a reaction within Israel upon the influences of the more philosophic and sceptical world outside, as embodied, for instance, in Alexandria. Job, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms are symptomatic of this critical movement, which is of peculiarly intense interest to us in modern times. The secure possession of a faith in one God and in His providence, coupled with the apprehensions of the value of the individual (and not only of the nation) in His sight, which we saw was one of the features of the later prophets, gave rise to questioning on the ancient but ever-new problem: How can the good providence of God be reconciled with the facts of life? The persistent adverse circumstances of the nation must have added fuel to the fires of discontent.

We see in the book of Job a challenge delivered to the traditional dogma that suffering is to be accounted for as a punishment for sin. It raises with final acuteness the problem of innocent suffering, and, as such, is a repudiation of the doctrine—so prevalent in the earlier literature, and more especially in Deuteronomy—that God orders affairs equitably, so that prosperity is the reward of virtue and adversity the punishment for sin.

Some of the Psalms are magnificent expressions of the heart's dismay and perplexity in face of the seeming absence of divine control over human destiny. Others breathe the mood of fearful distress with which men look into the face of death. Nothing in all literature is more bold than the outpouring, direct to God, of the clamouring questions which grip the soul as the tragic in life presses upon it.

Ecclesiastes strikes a note which may rightly be called sceptical and pessimistic, whereas Job and the questioning Psalms are the expression of a faith whose vigour cries out for an answer to its perplexity. That at the time of Christ disputes were still in existence as to the canonicity of the book is not to be wondered at. For its message is clean contrary to the main faith of the Old Testament. Its disbelief in purpose and value in life and in history, its weary refrain : " Vanity of vanity," are the repudiation of the generally invincible optimism and belief in divine purpose, which is distinctive of Jewish faith. There is good reason to believe that the book as we have it has been " touched up " so as to appear to conform with the requirements of Jewish piety.[1]

The spirit of protest against current doctrine and practice finds further expression in two other books—Jonah and Ruth. Jonah, it is true, is classed among the Latter Prophets, but the book comes to us from the period we are considering. It is a picturesque tract—truth in a tale directed

[1] *E.g.*, the concluding verses, chap. xii. 13, 14.

as a protest against the current exclusive intolerance of Judaism towards other nations. It is the most missionary of all the Old Testament writings.

The beautiful book of Ruth, on the other hand, is probably[1] a protest against the harsh measures taken after the exile against marriages entered into by Jews with non-Jews. It "quotes against the harsh dissolution of marriages with foreign wives the case of Ruth, who, Moabitess though she was, displayed a filial piety of the most beautiful type, took Naomi's God, country and people for her own, and won the admiration and love of Boaz, whose marriage with her was so blest by God that from it David and the royal house of Judah sprang."[2]

Proverbs is the chief ethical book of the Old Testament. It embodies the reflection of the Jew upon life's practical problem. Probably it brings together material handed down from antiquity, and thus harvests the wisdom of the race. Little room is found in it for national hopes or enthusiasm. Man as such is the subject of its moral philosophy. It assembles all available advice for the surmounting of life's trials and temptations.

Another element in the movement of thought and faith within the post-exilic Church was belief in a life beyond death. The greater part of the Old Testament is concerned with the development of godliness here, and with the continuance of the

[1] Many scholars would date it earlier.
[2] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 48.

nation in its destiny. But the faith which grew in appreciation of individual value, and at the same time was sensitive to individual tragedy, was forced over the horizons of this life, and is seen to be reaching out to the hope of immortality. We find this in some of the later Psalms, the Book of Wisdom (Apocrypha), and in the Book of Daniel.

The same influences were also at work to call forth those expressions of mingled hope and despair which are called Apocalyptic literature. Disappointment over the non-fulfilment of the visions of the prophets about the future, drove Jewish expectation and trust in God to frame pictures of the divine purpose being fulfilled through catastrophe and judgment. The canonical book in the Old Testament which is the instance of an Apocalypse is the book of Daniel, which was written to enhearten faith and loyalty at the time of the dread crisis of Antiochus Epiphanes' onslaught on Judaism, 168–165 B.C.

Of all the books written in this period the two books of the Chronicles are the ones which could be spared with least loss. They represent the re-writing of the history of the nation from the standpoint of the priestly school of historians. The result has small historical value. Yet, as we have seen, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are continuous with Chronicles, contain large extracts from the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, and are of importance inasmuch as they are almost the only sources on which we can draw for information about the resettlement of the nation after the exile.

On the whole the putting together of the Old Testament during the centuries after the exile represents an amazingly full and varied spiritual development. It will be well to consider in greater detail two elements in it which are of greatest interest to us—first, that synopsis of religious experience, the book of the Psalms; secondly, the Apocalyptic literature.

CHAPTER XX

THE PSALMS

"THE Old Testament in miniature" is an adaptation of a phrase of Luther's, who said: "You may fitly call the Psalter a Bible in miniature." Thus may be indicated how the Psalter gathers together and recapitulates the prolonged and varied experience of the children of Israel, as they journeyed along "the way that the Lord their God led them." The phrase has been adapted because the Psalms, though they contain a great many sign-posts which point towards Christ, yet do not reach Him; they remain preparatory to Him; they summarize the Old Testament, and only give glimpses of the New. Quite true, when once the great light has shone upon the face of Jesus Christ, the Psalms can then be read as tallying in many ways with that light. The Psalms thus have become the hymn-book of the Christian Church. In them she has found the matchless expression of that travail and aspiration of the human soul, which are met and satisfied by the Gospel she preaches.

Yet it is as well to put the Psalms in their proper historical position, and to beware of merely reading back into them that which they, by themselves, do not contain. Thus our wonder is in-

creased both over the richness, fullness, variety of the spiritual experience of which they are the expression, and also over the deeper truths to the revelation of which they are only preparatory. To view the Psalms historically allows us to be discriminating about them, and frankly to recognize that some of them are representative of the cruder phases in Israel's development of faith in God. In this way we can understand how it is some Psalms contain savage and vindictive sentiments, representative of a national religion, fighting for its life and its identity amid the dangers and seductions of surrounding heathendom (*e.g.* lxxxiii., lxviii., cxxxvii.).

Read, then, the Psalms as the " Old Testament in miniature." It may well be urged that to understand the Old Testament in these days is an intricate business. The scholars have come in and seem to have made a labyrinth of what was to our forbears a plain track. It is good that we can meet this real difficulty by pointing to the Psalms as the way which will lead the unlearned to understand a great deal of the Old Testament as a whole. The Psalms speak, in the great language which appeals to both heart and mind, of that central concern about and aspiration after God which is the salient feature of Israel. As a scholar has said, they are " the expression of emotions and feelings as they are stirred by the thought of God and directed Godward. This is the common characteristic of the Psalms in all their manifold variety. Some are directly addressed to God, as

petition or thanksgiving or praise : some are the communings of the soul with God, expressing its faith, its hope, its love, its needs, its fears, its aspirations, its joys, its triumphs : some celebrate the marvellous works of God in Nature and in history : some reflect upon the perplexing problems of life and their relations to the divine government of the world : but God is as it were the sun around which all revolves, and His light and heat illuminate and animate the whole." [1]

Some of the Psalms are the expression of that passion for righteousness which grew with Israel's apprehension of the holiness of God. They come from the hearts of those who long to be led by God in His ways (*e.g.* xxxii.). Others express the security of those who have found a practical rule of life in the ordinances of " the Law," and the delight of those who " enter into the courts of the Lord " and worship Him in His temple in familiar and customary ways (*e.g.* lxxxiv., cxix.). Others express the tenacity with which Israel remembered and celebrated the works of God in past days. The historical Psalms are the popular means by which a sense of destiny was nourished in the people. A Psalmist opens his mouth " in a parable, to declare hard sentences of old ; which we have heard and known, and such as our fathers have told us ; that we should not hide them from the children of the generations to come, but to show the honour of the Lord, His mighty and wonderful works that He hath done. He made a covenant

[1] A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Psalms*, p. x.

with Jacob, and gave Israel a law," etc. (lxviii.; cf. lxvii., cv., cvi.).

Some of the Psalms are the expression of thanksgiving for present deliverance, of faith grounded in the past but verified in the present (*e.g.* xlvi. to xlviii.). Some of them utter the sense which was so strong in the prophets of the perils of formal religion, of the opportunities missed, of divine demands disregarded (*e.g.* l., lxxxi.). Others nourish hope and expectation for the future. In the language of poetry they anticipate divine coming and judgment, the reign of God's anointed, the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom (*e.g.* ii., cx.).

Other Psalms—doubtless some of the later ones—are representative of the critical mood which, as we have seen (see chap. xiii.), sounds through some of the Wisdom literature. Side by side with Psalms of assurance and confidence and thanksgiving are Psalms of protest, perplexity and questioning. Here are lasting expressions of the sense of the mystery of evil, of the felt contrast between present fact and past tradition, of dissatisfaction with accepted ways of justifying God's righteousness, of the pain and despair which harrow the souls of men exposed to the tragic in life. Here is faith nakedly at odds with bitter experience and asking deep questions (*e.g.* xliv., lxxiii., lxxiv., lxxvii., lxxix., lxxxviii.).

And so we might go on. Many of the Psalms are national songs, instinct with corporate loyalty and passion and aspiration. It is in some of them

that the fiercest sentiments are found (*e.g.* cxxxviii.). Others are the deliverances of individual souls, the wonderful expression of the heights and depths, the light, the twilight, and the darkness of personal spiritual experience (*e.g.* lxxiii.). The men from whose hearts the most poignant and moving Psalms come have tasted of the full cup of life, have drunk to its dregs, have lived and loved, have sinned and repented, have battled and aspired, in a fashion marvellously representative of the lot of the whole human race. They voice the world's need of deliverance, mankind's need of a Saviour.

All such testimony is but heightened and enforced by the exploration by criticism of the way in which the Psalter came into existence. In former days it seemed enough to look upon the book as given to the world by one directly inspired author. Now we tend to view the book merely as the varied record of human experience. Formerly there were found in it the words of God to man: now, rather, the words of man to God. But the truth seems to lie with neither contrasted view taken by itself, but in the two views united. There is human—very human—experience in the Psalms: but there is more than that in them. They are evidence that in and through the whole process of life that they represent, there was at work—prompting, pervading, penetrating—the Spirit of God Himself.[1]

[1] All this can be appreciated by anyone who will read the Psalms with sympathetic, though quite unlearned mind. Yet scholarship and criticism have much to contribute to the understanding of this summary of religious experience. The editions

The Psalms, like all Scripture, have been a battle-field on which different schools of criticism have warred, conservative, moderate, radical. Tradition for many centuries attributed the whole book to David. Criticism then tried to attribute none of it to him and to show that all the Psalms are post-exilic if not Maccabean in date. But solid and reasonable results have emerged from this battle between extreme views.

There is no good reason for doubting that the compilation of the Psalms or Songs of Israel goes back to David, "the sweet psalmist." A scholar writes: "His skill as poet and musician, and his interest in the development of religious music, are attested by the earliest records (see 1 Sam. xvi., xvii. ff., xviii. 10; 2 Sam. i. 17 ff.; Amos vi. 5). Later times pointed to him as the founder of the services of the sanctuary (see 2 Chron. xxix., xxx.). The leaders of the Return from the Exile believed themselves to be restoring his institutions (see Ezra iii. 10; Neh. xii. 24, 36, 46). But in particular the incorporation of Psalm xviii. in the Book of Samuel (2 Sam. xxii.) as a specimen of David's poetry, illustrating his character and genius, is evidence in favour of regarding David as the founder of the Psalter, which cannot lightly be set aside. That Psalm is there circumstantially

of the Psalter which have an introduction and headings and marginal notes, which give indications as to the circumstances and occasion of different Psalms, are very enlightening. Mention may be made of one used and valued by the writer, *The Prayer Book Psalter*, with Introduction and Marginal Notes, by Dr. J. G. Carleton (Cambridge University Press).

ascribed to David, and there is no sufficient ground for placing the compilation of the Book of Samuel at so late a date that its evidence on this point can be disregarded as a mere tradition which had sprung up in the course of centuries." [1]

On the other hand it is impossible, with due regard to the internal evidence of the Psalms themselves, to ascribe all the Psalms or nearly all to David. Some of them were almost certainly occasioned by the great, ever memorable deliverance of Jerusalem from the hosts of Sennacherib (*e.g.* xlvi. to xlviii., lxxvi.). Others seem to imply the experience of exile (lxix., lxxx., lxxxix., cv., cvi.). Others, and more especially the famous 119th Psalm, presupposes a development of religion nourished by the Law which matches exilic or post-exilic times rather than the days of David. The teaching of the great prophets is heard through such a Psalm as the 50th. Some Psalms—the theocratic Psalms (xciii., xcvi., etc.)—were almost certainly written as thanksgivings for deliverance from exile, and were very probably used at the Dedication of the new Temple in 516 B.C.

In this sort of way we get a view of the Psalter as a compilation of Psalms dating from many periods in the history of Israel. Psalms as they appeared and became popular were added to "David," the file or folio of songs: just as proverbs as they accumulated were added to

[1] A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Psalms*, p. xli.

"Solomon," and as the successive stages of the Law were added to "Moses."

This view of the Psalter as a compilation covering many generations and derived from many sources is greatly to be preferred to attributing it to one author. For the Psalms are seen to be a broad, deep stream of varied experience, with many tributaries running into it. The universality of the book, its capacity to speak to every kind of human mood, is thus made the more intelligible.

In the same way, though the Psalms are far from being arranged in an exact chronological order, the Psalter, viewed as an accumulation or compilation of songs, serves to illustrate the story of the development and purification of the faith of Israel. Very roughly, the Psalms which are most probably attributable to David are in the earlier portions of the Psalter (Books 1 and 2): the Psalms which reflect prophetic teaching, and the experience of exile, are in the middle, while the Psalms of doubt and criticism, the Psalms of a purified thought of God (*e.g.* cxxxix.), appear in the latter half of the Psalter.

Enough has been indicated to justify the contention that scholarship and criticism are here as elsewhere helpful and constructive rather than the reverse, and that the Psalms should be studied with due attention to their history and circumstances.

Yet it is well to end on the glory of the Psalter as a treasury of devotion, transcending limitations by time or period or race, and wondrously adapted

to human needs everywhere. The testimony of great souls in the Church of Christ is evidence of this. St Chrysostom describes the universality of the use of the Psalms: "If we keep vigil in the Church, David comes first, last and midst. If early in the morning we seek for the melody of hymns, first, last and midst is David again. If we are occupied with the funeral solemnities of the departed, if virgins sit at home and spin, David is first, last and midst. O marvellous wonder! . . . Nor is it in cities and churches alone that at all times David is illustrious; in the midst of the forum, in the wilderness, and uninhabitable land, he excites the praises of God." St Athanasius wrote of the Psalms: "They seem to me to be a kind of mirror for every one who sings them, in which he may observe the motions of the soul, and as he observes them give utterance to them in words. He who hears them read, takes them as if they were spoken specially for him. Stricken in his conscience he repents, or hearing of hope in God, and of the grace which is given to those who believe, he rejoices as if this grace were pronounced to him in particular, and begins to thank God. . . . Methinks that in the words of this book you may find an accurate survey and delineation of the whole life of man." "This book," said Calvin, "I am wont to call an anatomy of all parts of the soul. For no one will find in himself a single feeling of which the image is not reflected in this mirror." "In the Psalms," wrote Dean Church, "we see the soul in the secret of its workings, in

the variety and play of its many-sided and subtly compounded nature—loving, hoping, fearing, despairing, exulting, repenting, aspiring—the soul, conscious of the greatness and sweetness of its relations to Almighty God, and penetrated by them to the quick: longing, thirsting, gasping, after the glimpses that visit it, of His goodness and beauty—awestruck before the unsearchableness of His judgments, silent before the certainty of His righteousness, opening like a flower to the sun in the presence of His light, of the immensity of His loving-kindness."

CHAPTER XXI

APOCALYPTIC

The last feature of the long and trying years that intervened between the exile and the dawning of the Christian era is the outlook upon the world which is called Apocalyptic. "The term Apocalypse means an 'unveiling,' or 'disclosure,' and a book that bears the name claims to reveal and make plain things which are ordinarily hidden from human eyes. An Apocalypse, therefore, displays very little interest in the present world—it is essentially an unveiling of the future, and it strives to open a window through which it is possible to look into the realities of the unseen world. The nearest approach to Apocalyptic in other literature is to be found in the vision of the realm of the dead in Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Æneid*, and in the visions of Purgatory and Heaven in the poems of Dante." [1]

This literature is yet another symptom of the fierce and testing character of the post-exilic centuries. The subjugation of God's people, no longer a monarchy and shorn of political power, to successive foreign empires, bred in souls, which were nourished by prophetic hopes, deep and acute disappointment. The same spiritual and

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 431.

mental stress which found expression in the Psalms of protest and questioning and in the boldly critical Book of Job, lies behind Apocalyptic literature. How was faith in divine providence and purpose in history to be nourished? How were God's ways with men to be justified? How reconcile the promises made to "the Fathers" with the actualities of present experience?

In face of these questions Apocalyptic may be said to be faith under pressure of life finding new and wider outlet. It has well been called "not the abandonment of faith, but its intensification."[1] It represents the assurance—assurance all but changed to despair—that the purpose of God, seemingly defeated or unapparent on the field of ordinary history, would be wrought out to victory by catastrophic intervention and judgment.

Apocalyptic literature grew out of and went beyond prophetic. "Apocalyptic proper begins with the Book of Enoch and the Book of Daniel, but neither the method nor the idea was altogether new. Germs of both are to be found in the prophets themselves.[2] Most of the prophets spoke of 'a day of the Lord.' 'Behold the day of the Lord cometh with wrath and fierce anger to lay the land desolate,' says the unknown writer of Isaiah xiii. The second chapter of Joel is a splendid illustration of Apocalyptic. It foretells the advent of 'the day,' and describes it as 'a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick dark-

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 432.
[2] See end of Chap. XIV.

ness. . . . I will shew wonders in the heaven and in the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The earth shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.' The same conception forms the main theme of the prophecy of Zephaniah: 'Wait upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations . . . to pour upon them mine indignation . . . for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy' (Zeph. iii. 8; cf. i. 14-18). Then, too, we have in Isaiah lxv. the vision of the new heavens and the new earth which God is to create in place of the old."[1]

But Apocalyptic extends the range of prophetic vision. The great prophets were for the most part intensely concerned with contemporary history, with national and local politics and the questions of their age. Their hopes often centred upon this or that particular king. The whole ministry of the first Isaiah, with its climax in the resistance to Sennacherib in the reign of the good king Hezekiah, is an instance of what we mean. Yet prophetic vision rose beyond the horizons of present history in future hopes. Ever and again it looks ahead to the coming of the day of the Lord, to a royal figure bringing in a reign of righteousness and peace, to the lifting of Zion to a position of dominion over the nations. This forward-looking vision is, as we have seen, the root of later Apocalyptic. But the latter sweeps into its vision

[1] Peake, *Commentary*, p. 432.

more than the historical destiny of Israel amid the surrounding peoples. It sees the breaking in upon the whole world of a new and different order of things. It turns from the despairingly slow movements of historical development and invokes the sudden arrival from beyond of the Kingdom of God. It tries to frame a philosophy of history which is revolutionary and catastrophic by contrast with historical development.

Thus Apocalyptic looks to "the end," or as scholars say, it is eschatological (containing doctrine of the "last things"). Just as it reached out into the unseen and the beyond as the quarter whence national deliverance would come, so it looked beyond death for assurance as regards individual destiny. The same pressure of evil, of adversity and disappointment, which drove faith to unveil the future of national destiny, drove it to look beyond death, for light upon the fate of individuals. Thus along with visions of world-judgments and catastrophes there grew—with many varying conceptions—the belief in the resurrection, the judgment, the reward or the punishment of individuals.

Apocalyptic thought and strivings produced an enormous and widely-current literature in the two centuries before Christ. But only one book found a place in the Canon of the Old Testament, namely Daniel. It has been one of the achievements of modern scholarship to disinter and to republish this literature and to establish its great vogue both before and after the coming of Christ.

Familiarity thus has been made possible with books such as the Book of Enoch, the Book of the Secrets of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Jubilees (or "Little Genesis"), the Ascension of Isaiah, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. There were several versions and translations into a variety of languages of such books. The world of thought, imagination and vision opened up by this literature is indeed strange and fantastic. Symbol and figurative language fill it in rich and weird profusion. These characteristics are the reflex of the agony and tension of soul which gave rise to the literature.

A feature of the literature which is evident in the titles of the different books, is that the writers never write in their own names, but always adopt the name of one of the great figures in Israel's past. In other words, these writings are pseudonymous. Many reasons have been put forward for this literary device, such as fear of martyrdom or lack of literary ambition on the part of the writers. The most probable explanation is that at the time when Apocalyptic flourished, the Law had been established in Israel as the complete embodiment of the Divine Revelation. In the face of this overshadowing fact the Apocalyptic writers, who had no claim to the direct and personal inspiration or authority of the prophets, endeavoured to secure a hearing for their teaching by attributing it to one of the great names in Jewish history.

As we have said, the only instance of Apocalyptic

proper in the Old Testament is the Book of Daniel. The other Jewish Apocalypses were written too late to find a place in the Old Testament Canon. It is probable that anyone who becomes familiar with their strangely fantastic character is thankful for this. At the same time, by the presence within it of the book of Daniel the Old Testament takes up into its deep main stream this last great tributary of Apocalyptic, representative as it is of faith and aspiration exercised by the mystery of existence. We may be sure that the book of Daniel is in line with the rest of Apocalyptic literature in being late in date and pseudonymous in character. Some writer, living in the tremendous crisis of the attack upon Judaism by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C., composed this book of comfort, based on the past, and of hope for the future, and attributed it to Daniel. "Daniel," says a great and conservative scholar, "it cannot be doubted was a historical person, one of the Jewish exiles in Babylon, who, with his three companions, was noted for his staunch adherence to the principles of his religion, who attained a position of influence at the Court of Babylon, who interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, and foretold, as a seer, something of the future fate of the Chaldean and Persian Empires. Perhaps written materials were at the disposal of the author: it is, at any rate, probable that for the descriptions in chapters ii. to vii. he availed himself of some work or works dealing with the history of Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

These traditions are cast by the author into a literary form with a special view to the circumstances of his own time. The motive underlying chapters i. to vi. is manifest. The aim of these chapters is not merely to describe who Daniel was or to narrate certain incidents in his life: it is also to magnify the God of Daniel, to show how He, by His providence, frustrates the purposes of the proudest of earthly monarchs, while He defends His servants, who cleave to Him faithfully in the midst of temptation. The narratives in chapters i. to vi. are thus adapted to supply motives for the encouragement, and models for the imitation, of those suffering under the persecution of Antiochus." [1]

That the book is to be dated from the beginning of the persecution of Antiochus (165 B.C.) and not from the exile in Babylon, is a conclusion established by many converging lines of evidence. It is never quoted in Jewish literature before the second century B.C. It does not appear in the list of heroes of the nation, which includes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets, to be found in Ecclesiasticus (chapters xliv. to li.) written about 190 B.C. The book does not appear among "the Prophets" in the Canon of the Old Testament, but among "the Writings." If Daniel had been a contemporary record it would have appeared in the second division of the Canon (the Prophets) which was not completed till the second century B.C. As it is, it appears in the third

[1] Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 479.

division, among the Writings, and amongst the latest of these in proximity to Esther. And so on.

There are also many historical inaccuracies in the book, such as depicting Belshazzar as the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, whereas he was neither the one nor the other, or the representation of Darius as receiving the kingdom after the conquest of Babylon, whereas history records that Cyrus was the immediate successor of Nabu-Nahid, the last of the kings of Babylon. There is further much evidence of a literary kind (*e.g.* that some of the book is in Aramaic) which points to a late date.

The contents of the book are in corroboration. The comprehensive survey of the succession of world empires, under whose tyranny Israel had fallen, ends with a long description of the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus is the "little horn" (viii. 9) "which waxed exceeding great toward the south and the east," and the "king of fierce countenance understanding dark sentences" (viii. 23). The description of Antiochus is "full and vivid and extends over twenty-four verses (xi. 21-45), showing that the writer's main interest is in the great persecution initiated by him." It is equally evident that the book was written during and not after the persecution. "While down to the period of the Antiochus persecution the actual events are described with surprising distinctness, after this point the distinctness ceases, the prophecy either breaks off altogether, or merges in an ideal representation of the Messianic future."

There is much that is obscure in the book of Daniel, as in all Apocalypses. But two great things stand out. Firstly, the epoch-making expression of belief in life beyond death, which is clearer here than anywhere else in the Old Testament proper. The belief, it will be noted, is not universal in its scope. " And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever " (xii. 2, 3). Secondly, the vision of " one like unto a son of man, who came even to the ancient of days and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and languages should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed " (vii. 13, 14). It is true that in the interpretation of the vision (vii. 16) the phrase son of man is found to be a collective name for the nation as " the saints of the Most High." But here, as so often, thought and words contained more than their possessors knew. Here we see faith rising invincible over adversity, and expectation, wrung by trial, but holding fast ; and these are the roots of true prophecy.

Here we reach the last stages in the long road, which leads up to the fullness of the times, and the coming of Christ.

A WORD IN SUMMARY

We have travelled a long road, and have made a prolonged ascent. The Old Testament is the story of a great quest, of the spiritual travail of a people to find and to know God. But, more fundamentally, it is the story of God's choice of a people, of His purifying and teaching them, of His making them at last the possessors of a unique spiritual trust. The long ascent which Israel climbed was not of their devising, it was "all the way which the Lord their God led them" (Deut. viii. 2).

So a great height is reached which towers over the plains of natural religion. It is the height of belief in One God, the living, the holy, the righteous Being, the God of covenant, purpose and promise; the reality of whose providence was verified by His people through all the successive crises of their history, despite all their infidelities and backslidings.

Yet there are heights beyond. For at the topmost height of the Old Testament, where the prophetic men of plainest inspiration stand and speak, the vision of God for all its glory is nevertheless threatened, veiled—is all but blotted out—by the mystery of evil; and the destiny of man is

all but rendered hopeless because of his bondage to sin. So there is nothing final in the Old Testament. There must be more to come from God, to break the deadlock which it reaches. There must come an hour of God's self-vindication and victory over evil, and of man's deliverance. So the book testifies. For to the last it is a book of unconquerable expectation. It looks for the redemption of Israel. It awaits the Day of the Lord.

So we pass to the New Testament, to the book which witnesses to the Coming of God and to the fulfilment of His promises. We are brought to the heights higher than any height in the Old Testament, whither the Jew could not climb, as the last of the prophets—John the Baptist—knew and declared. Only the hand of God Himself, reaching down, could lift His people thither. But when the divine fulfilment came, it was at the highest level attained in the Old Testament, that our Lord began His work. He built upon the faith of Israel in the living God, where He found that faith alive. And upon that central root and stem the Christian revelation was grafted.

It is that faith in God—its growth and development, its forging and testing, its expansion and purification—which matters in the Old Testament. As we find our way through the vicissitudes of Israel's history; as we mingle with the procession of patriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, priests and common folk, we may well exclaim: What is it all about? Is there a main clue to it all?

In so exclaiming, we ask the question providen-

tially asked of our Lord by the scribe, who was doubtful if he could see the wood for the trees: "Tell us, what is the main point? What commandment is the first of all?" And in one great summarizing word Jesus answered: "The first is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark xii. 29-31).

Here, in one word, the whole of the Old Testament is summed up. Here, once for all, the ideal of all true religion is defined. And it is by Him, who so answered, that the ideal was realized, and in Him it has been made available for all mankind.

PART II

THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I

THE DOOR INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT

When at last we reach the New Testament we ask: How are we to read it? Where should we begin? The answer is: Begin with the gospel underlying the Epistles.

It is a mistake to begin with the Gospel narratives, though, as we shall see, there is everlasting value in reading and re-reading them. But to understand them rightly we ought not to begin with them. For it is unhistorical to do so. They are not the first Christian writings. The first, the earliest, Christian documents are some of the Epistles. The early Epistles are the door to the New Testament, as the prophets are the door to the Old. The greater number of the Epistles were in existence before the Gospel narratives, as we have them, existed in written form.

So to the Epistles then let us go—to the Epistles as a whole and to what they imply. For the Epistles came into existence as a result of the preaching and acceptance of a certain gospel or good news. That good news therefore is in the

Epistles by implication ; it is not there in deliberate or formal or explicit statement. We need to take these letters and ask, as we read them : What is it that these letters assume has been preached and received ?

The answer is that a good news of God has been proclaimed ; that a great light has shone in the darkness of paganism ; that deliverance has come near to people in moral captivity, to set them free and to instil into them a new energy ; that the chains of the fear of death have been struck off ; that the invisible, eternal and heavenly world has been opened and made capable of access. That is a summary of the implications and witness of the Epistles (and with them, at this stage, we will include the Acts). These writings have one great note sounding through them. There is a variety of authorship, of date, of stage of development in these writings. But deeper than all their differences is one identical thing—a witness to something come from, fulfilled and being fulfilled by God. The writings are part of the consequences which flow from a supreme arrival from on high. The Old Testament is, to the last, a book of Godward expectation. The New Testament is, from the beginning, a book of expectation—of expectation met, fulfilled and satisfied by God. Nothing could be greater than this central emphasis—this testimony to what God had done, was doing and is. It is more than a message about Jesus ; it *is quite essentially and fundamentally about God.* To understand this

is quite vital to a right reading of the New Testament.

Hence the profit of appreciating the great keywords which are scattered about the New Testament writings. They go deeper than the differences which distinguish the Pauline, the Petrine, the Johannine elements in the New Testament, "The things which God foreshadowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled" (St Peter's speech, Acts iii. 18). "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman" (St Paul, Gal. iv. 4). "God commendeth his own love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (St Paul, Rom. v. 8). "But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (St Paul, 2 Cor. v. 18, 19). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (St Peter, 1 Pet. i. 3). "Herein was the love of God manifested in our case, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins" (St John, 1 John iv. 9, 10).

Here is the basic Gospel of God. It is never argued nor proved by the Epistles. They assume

it. It is *there*, it had been long there, ere ever a word of the New Testament was written. It is that of which St Paul speaks in his own idiom. But it is far more than merely his gospel. It is there because it is in the possession of the Christian society, the Church of God, the New Israel inheriting the fulfilment of the promises made to the Old—the New Israel inclusive of Gentile as well as of Jew. Behind the writings, as a bed out of which they grow as the flowers, lies the living believing body, itself part of the salvation wrought out by God Himself.

This, then, is the way to begin to read the New Testament. In beginning with the Epistles we need not be haunted by problems of authenticity or authorship. No doubt there are degrees of certainty on some points. Scholars, for instance, are more sure that St Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians than that he wrote the Epistle to Timothy. But on the whole the genuineness and reliability of the Epistles, after passing through the fiercest ordeal of criticism, are established. One of the greatest living scholars, Dr Harnack, writes: "The most ancient literature of the Church is in all chief points and in the majority of details veracious and worthy of belief from the point of view of literary history. In the whole New Testament there is probably only one work which can in the strictest sense be called pseudonymous, it is the Second Epistle of St Peter."

If this is true of the New Testament as a whole, it is with the utmost confidence that we can go

to the earliest of the New Testament documents. They are the group of St Paul's first letters, consisting of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians. These are the Epistles of the missionary journeys, distinguished from the later groups, which are severally called the Epistles of the Captivity, namely, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon; and the Pastoral Epistles, namely, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. For finding entirely firm historical footing in the New Testament it is enough to go to the first group of letters, which are quite certainly Pauline and are securely dated in between A.D. 50 and 55. The first Christian document, which lifts the curtain that covers the first days of the Faith, is the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, written little, if any, later than twenty years after the Crucifixion. There is much in the Epistle that is of local and of passing interest. But it contains the clearest possible witness to the fact that a Gospel of God in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit had been preached and received.

And if it is asked: What was the belief of the Church during the twenty years in between the Crucifixion and the earliest Epistle? we have not only the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles to guide us. For in the Galatians, an epistle which some would place as even earlier than the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, we have clear evidence that the gospel which St Paul had preached was essentially that which had been preached by others from the first.

For the first two chapters testify to the existence at Jerusalem from the first of a body of Apostles, as authoritative witnesses and pillars of the truth. It was before this body that St Paul laid "the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles" (Gal. ii. 2). And, though it is evident that there was great tension between Paul, who had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, and Peter, with the apostleship of the circumcision, yet James and Peter and John gave to Paul "the right hand of fellowship" as to a comrade in the same warfare. We have here the warrant that the gospel preached by St Paul was substantially identical with that witnesssed to him from the first. In confirmation of this we have the further emphatic statement of St Paul about the gospel which he preached, whereof the Resurrection was the centre. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . . and last of all he appeared unto me also. For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle . . . but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I but the grace of God which was with me. *Whether then it be I or they*, so we preach and so ye believed" (1 Cor. xv. 3-11).

This, then, is the right way to begin to read the New Testament, namely to extricate from the earlier Epistles of St Paul the Creed of the

Christian Church. This does not mean to say that there was no development of that creed. We shall treat of that later. But it does mean that there was never in existence a gospel simpler than that which underlies the earlier Epistles of St Paul, and is common to them and the first Epistle of St Peter and the first chapters of the Acts. We can trace that which is substantially the Apostles' Creed underlying Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. It is belief in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was born of a woman, was crucified, died and was buried; descended into Hades, rose from the dead on the third day, and sitteth on the right hand of God; and shall come from heaven to judge; and in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the forgiveness of sins, the Communion of Saints, the Resurrection of the Body, and the Life Everlasting. As has been well said: "The whole presentation of the Christian life which St Paul urges upon the acceptance of those to whom he writes, assumes the main facts and truths which are in the Creed. His argument would have no force to maintain its conclusions, his presentation of Christian life would be suspended in the air, if the facts and truths were not assumed as accepted in common by the writer and the readers of the Epistles. The confidence with which he makes the assumption guarantees that he is entitled to make it, that he is only assuming what is as a matter of fact generally believed. This

is especially significant in regard to the Epistle to the Romans, written as it is to a Church which St Paul did not found, which he had not hitherto taught, a community which had grown up spontaneously out of elements contributed so to say at haphazard by the various centres of Christianity in the Eastern half of the Empire." [1]

To begin to read the New Testament thus is in contrast with much that has been fashionable in modern study of the Bible. Many people have gone at once to the gospel narratives on the supposition that there—more especially in St Mark—is to be found some simple core or kernel of Christianity, with its centre in Jesus of Nazareth and in His teaching. By contrast with this core they have set aside the Epistles as full of so much Pauline theology and ecclesiasticism. "Back to Jesus and the simplicities of the Sermon on the Mount" has been the cry. Thus some scholars have played off the Jesus of the gospel story against the Christ of the Epistles; the teaching of Jesus, against the theology of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; the Nazarene against Paul the Jewish Rabbi—and so on.

But such an attitude, though fruitful in the production of vivid and realistic studies of the personality and character of Jesus, is nevertheless quite illegitimate. As we have said, there never was at any stage a gospel simpler than what is implied by the early Acts and the earliest Epistles. From the very start the Gospel was a gospel of

[1] W. Richmond, *The Creed in the Epistles*, p. 103.

God in Christ, and no mere teaching about Him delivered by a human teacher. Quite true, there is development in the meaning of the gospel, which is to be traced in the course of the New Testament. Quite true that there are distinctively Pauline elements which he contributed to the process of understanding the gospel of God in Christ. But the main thing remains true, that the earliest form of Christianity was nothing less than the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Glorified Lord.

If therefore we would read the New Testament historically, our footsteps must pass not from the Gospel stories on to the Epistles, but the other way, namely, from the faith and life represented by the Epistles to the Gospel stories. If so, then the questions which have to be met are: How does the story of Jesus of Nazareth come in? How are we to read it? How does it lead up to the Christian faith and life which it presupposes? How is the Jesus of St Mark to be related to the Christ of the Epistles? How do the *Gospels* account for the *Gospel?*

CHAPTER II

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS [1]

GRANTED, then, that the earliest thing in the New Testament is the life and faith of the believing Church, the existence of which is implied by the first Epistles of St Paul, we proceed to consider the first three Gospels, leaving the fourth Gospel for later treatment. We wish to find out how the story of the ministry of Jesus is related to the religion, the exigencies of which gave rise to the Epistles; how Jesus of Nazareth is related to the faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The first three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because of their likeness to one another. They take the same view of the ministry of Jesus.

No documents in the whole of literature have been submitted to such a searching process of analysis as these three short books. Not a jot or tittle in their contents but has been passed through the sieve—of minutest mesh—of historical criticism. Friend and foe of the Christian faith have joined in the process; construction and destruction have alike been at work; but the main characteristic of the whole infinitely careful

[1] B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, pp. 166-168. I owe much in this chapter to this book.

examination has been the desire to arrive at historical truth—at the real Jesus, the true facts of His life, His authentic teaching.

Such criticism has raised a great many more questions than it has answered. But certain main results stand out clearly. The first is the priority of the second Gospel—St Mark—to the first and third—St Matthew and St Luke. We can be sure that the writers of the first and third Gospels had St Mark's Gospel before them. Practically the whole of St Mark is to be found in either one or the other of the later Gospels. Out of 661 verses in St Mark, St Matthew reproduces the substance of 600, while St Luke reproduces the substance of 350. The method adopted by the later writers is not the same. "Matthew is a fresh edition of Mark, revised, rearranged and enriched with new material; . . . Luke is a new historical work made by combining parts of Mark with parts of other documents. . . . Matthew's method is to make Mark the framework into which non-Marcan matter is to be fitted, on the principle of joining like to like. That is to say, whenever he finds in a non-Marcan source teaching which would elaborate or illustrate a saying in Mark, he inserts that particular piece of non-Marcan matter into that particular context in the Marcan story. . . . Luke's method is quite different and much simpler. He makes Marcan and non-Marcan material to alternate in great blocks. . . . This alternation suggests the inference that the non-Marcan materials, though probably ultimately derived from more

than one source, had already been combined into a single written document before they were used by the author of the third Gospel. The further inference is that this combined non-Marcan document was regarded by Luke as his main source, and supplied the framework into which he fitted extracts from Mark." [1]

Another main result, of a certainty inferior to that of the priority of St Mark to the other two Gospels, is that St Matthew and St Luke had before them another document which the scholars have agreed to call Q (the first letter of Quelle, the German for source). This hypothetical document was formerly called the " Logia " or sayings : it is associated by tradition with St Matthew : it consists almost entirely not of narrative but of the teaching of Jesus. In this it contrasts with St Mark, where narrative greatly outweighs the report of teaching. Scholars have laboured strenuously to reconstruct the document called Q out of the two hundred non-Marcan verses which appear both in St Matthew and in St Luke. But no finality has been reached by them. The common material is not arranged by either evangelist always in the same context or in the same order. It is very unlikely that if St Mark's Gospel had not existed, scholars would have been able to reconstruct it out of the matter common to the first and third Gospels. For the use which either make of Marcan material is not identical.

[1] B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, pp. 166-168.

But St Mark and Q together do not account for the Gospels of St Matthew and of St Luke. There is a considerable amount of material which is peculiar to St Matthew and a large amount which is peculiar to St Luke. Do these sections imply the existence of other documents additional to St Mark and Q? Here scholarship speaks with an uncertain voice. But some scholars think that St Matthew had a third source, which is called M. This document is thought to represent the tradition at Jerusalem—while on the other hand it is suggested that Q emanated from and had the backing of the important Church at Antioch. "The material peculiar to Matthew, in sharp contrast to Luke's, is characterized by a conspicuously Jewish atmosphere; and though rich in anti-Pharisaic polemic, it asserts the obligation of obeying not only the Law, but the 'tradition of the Scribes,' and it has a distinctly anti-Gentile bias. It reflects the spirit and outlook with which in the New Testament the name of James is associated; though James himself, like most leaders, was doubtless far less extreme than his professed followers. The source M will naturally be connected with Jerusalem, the headquarters of the James party." [1]

On the other hand there is a large amount of material in St Luke which is throughout non-Marcan, but is in parts mixed up with material from Q. These sections (*e.g.* chapters vi. 20 to viii. 3; ix. 51 to xviii. 14) taken altogether are

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

much larger in extent than those derived from St Mark. Some scholars think that they stood together in a single document, which constituted a complete Gospel, and that into its framework St Luke inserted the extracts which he drew from St Mark. It has been suggested that St Luke did the same thing as regards both his Gospel and the Acts, namely " embodied an early sketch with a larger and maturer history " : that " during the two years he was at Cæsarea in the company of Paul he made good use of his opportunities of collecting information and made copious notes. Later on, probably not till after the death of Paul, a copy of Q came his way, and on the basis of this and his own notes, he composed a Gospel for the use of the Church in the place where he was then living. Still later a copy of Mark came his way, and he then produced the second and enlarged edition of his Gospel that has come down to us." [1]

Here we are in the region of conjecture rather than of assured result. But few things are more remarkable in the course of New Testament criticism than the consideration of the prestige of St Luke as a writer and historian. Much endeavour has been given to exalt St Mark at the expense of the other evangelists, but it seems probable that in St Luke we have authority comparable with, or even superior to, St Mark. We know how he figures as a connecting link between the great eye-witnesses on the one hand, and the apostle of the Gentiles on the other. The man who wrote in the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Acts the great epic of the expansion of Christianity, was the same man who took in hand in his Gospel narrative "to trace the course of all things accurately from the first." It is he who more than any other New Testament writer had the opportunity of bringing together the traditions which were associated with the various main centres of Christianity. His use of St Mark gave him material which almost certainly was derived from St Peter and the Church at Rome. He was himself, as companion of St Paul, brought into touch with the Church at Antioch, Cæsarea and Jerusalem.

We are justified, therefore, in attaching great importance to his introduction to his Gospel, containing as it does material drawn from Mark, Q, and the document which very probably he wrote at Cæsarea. We see how he refers to several endeavours to draw up Gospel narratives. "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning things wherein thou wast instructed" (Luke i. 1-4).

Here, as nowhere else, do we find expressed the general mind which moulded the Synoptic tradition. We see that the Gospel narratives were

written by Christians to Christians, "from faith to faith": that they imply that the Gospel, which has as its vital centre and foundation the witness of the great eye-witnesses, had been carried out, had been accepted and was in being in the believing Church. In other words, as we have seen, the faith and life implied by the Epistles constitute the motive from which the gospel narratives issued, and the context in which they must be read if they are to be read historically.

We have looked far enough into the sphere of Synoptic discussion to realize that the first three Gospels as we have them represent the bringing together—the agglomeration—of material drawn from different quarters and different sources. Much effort has been expended on the drawing out of differences within the total agglomeration. For instance, those who have a special interest in the teaching of Jesus have made much of the contrast between Q and St Mark. Others have traced the modification of the Marcan material at the hands of St Matthew and St Luke—the smoothing and compression of St Mark's rugged and redundant style at the expense, so it seems sometimes, of his vividness and vigour. Others have endeavoured to demonstrate a heightening of the supernatural element, to be discerned in the latter as contrasted with the earlier layers in the conglomerate mass of evangelical tradition.

But it is only fair to enforce that what is far more remarkable than differences in the various

elements in the Gospels, is their unanimity and homogeneity. The more sources to which this part and that are to be traced, the more noteworthy the harmony and coherence of the whole which they make up. It is not for nothing that the first three Gospels have been called Synoptic. They take substantially the same view of Jesus and of His ministry. They ring out the same note; they are fragrant with the same odour. And the sameness is a sameness enriched by differences. The different sources and authorities amplify, enrich, corroborate, reinforce each other. They witness to the existence of some dominant, central, and unifying influences.

There can be little doubt what that influence was. It was the presence at the heart of evangelical tradition of the original eye-witnesses—the original friends and followers of Jesus. Fundamentally the gospel narratives are the record of their experience. They reflect the main impression made upon them by the Master. They imply the way in which, by means of an intensely dramatic experience, they had been brought—had been wrought—into possession of the Gospel of God in Him. They are dominated and saturated by this apostolic witness. They represent a corporate mind—something original and creative; something powerful enough to draw to itself that which was harmonious to itself and to reject the reverse.

We shall best arrive at understanding this dominating and all-influential witness of the disciples of Jesus if we study the narrative, so

centrally embedded in the Synoptic tradition, namely St Mark's Gospel. Space forbids a review of the first and third Gospels.[1] But to grasp the story told by St Mark is to get to the heart of the other two.

[1] Note for the Second Edition.

In not reviewing St Matthew's and St Luke's Gospels it has been suggested that I pass over in convenient silence the accounts of Our Lord's birth. There is, I admit, an advantage in starting with St Mark's Gospel, just because it does not begin with the fact of the Virgin Birth. And the advantage is that it enables us to try out thoroughly and without prejudice the hypothesis (see p. 232) that Jesus was no more than another man among men. But when, in following the Marcan high road, that hypothesis utterly breaks down (see pp. 252 ff.), and we are brought again to the conclusion that Jesus was not "from below" but "from above"—that He was the Son come forth from the Father, then the harmony of the Virgin Birth with that conclusion comes home to us afresh. I feel sure myself that the Gospel of the Great Arrival from on high, which from the first was the glory of the Church and its essential message, was greatly illuminated and reinforced, when "the things" which Mary "kept and pondered in her heart" came to be known. For they tell of that which characterizes the whole fact of Christ from first to last, and that is the initiative and gift and action of God.

CHAPTER III

ST MARK

If the main course of the ministry of Jesus is to be rightly understood, as it is conveyed by the first three Gospels, St Mark's Gospel must be studied first. It was this Gospel which lay before the writers of the first and third Gospels, and, though they incorporate other material with that which they take over from St Mark, they do so by fitting it into the main Marcan framework. This does not mean that we can find in St Mark anything like what can rightly be called a complete biography or life of Jesus, arranged with chronological exactness. Yet St Mark's story is not just a disconnected series of scenes and anecdotes. It has a certain dramatic unity or structure in it; it mounts by stages or steps to a climax. It represents, roughly, the way in which the story of the experience of the disciples of Jesus was told—the main shape into which it fell. "It is, speaking broadly, a record in writing of that fundamental Apostolic tradition upon which, from the first, the spoken message of 'the Gospel' had been based." It is this that the other writers, who had St Mark before them, must have felt; and it is that that they took over and did not obliterate in adding other material. It is this, too, that powerfully

helped to secure that the first three Gospels, despite all their differences, make one story.

This vital document comes to us with great authority. Evidently, as being used by the other evangelists, it was regarded in the first century as a primary authority. It is practically certain that behind it stands the great authoritative figure of St Peter, and that it had the backing of the Church at Rome.

The earliest light upon the composition of the Gospel is given by Papias, who was Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor about A.D. 125, and was in touch with the companions of the disciples of Jesus. Eusebius quotes the following statements of Papias: "If ever anyone came, who had been a follower of the elders, I would inquire as to the discourses of the elders, what was said by Andrew, or what by Peter, or what by Philip, or what by Thomas or James, or what by John, or Matthew, or any of the disciples of the Lord . . . for I did not think that one gets so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice." And about St Mark's Gospel: "This also the elder said: Mark, indeed, who became the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, as far as he remembered them, the things said or done by the Lord, but not however in order. For he had neither heard the Lord nor been his personal follower, but at a later stage, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to adapt the teachings to the needs of the moment (or of his hearers), but not as though he were drawing up

a connected account of the oracles of the Lord; so that Mark committed no error in writing certain matters just as he remembered them. For he had one object in view, viz. to leave out nothing of the things which he had heard, and to include no false statement among them."

When we come to St Mark as author, we have to remember how closely linked he was with the central Christian authorities. We come upon him in the Acts, about fifteen years after Pentecost, in his mother's house at Jerusalem. This house was frequented by the first Christians in Jerusalem. It may not improbably have contained the "Upper Room" where the Lord held the Last Supper. St Peter went thither after his release from prison: "he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts xii. 12).

St Mark, too, may have been the young man "having a linen cloth cast about him over his naked body," who fled at the arrest of Jesus (Mark xiv. 51, 52). This incident is recorded only by St Mark. A recent scholar supposes "that Judas had left the Supper Room before Jesus and the rest of the disciples, and that he returned with the armed band in the first instance to the house where the Supper had been held (St Mark's home ?), supposing that our Lord and the others would still be there. Recriminations pass, when it is discovered that this is not the case, between Judas and the party to which he is acting as guide,

and Gethsemane is suggested as a probable place where Jesus may be found. Mark, who is in bed, hears what is happening, starts up, and throwing a sheet about him (' no time to dress ! '), rushes on ahead to warn our Lord of what is afoot, but arrives too late for the warning to be effective, and is all but arrested himself." [1]

However this may be, it is St Mark whom St Paul and St Barnabas take with them from Jerusalem to Antioch after the death of Herod. " And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark " (Acts xii. 25). He accompanied the two Apostles on their first missionary journey " as their attendant " (Acts xiii. 5). We know, too, that he was the cousin of Barnabas (Col. iv. 10). But at Perga in Pamphylia " John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem " (Acts xiii. 13). This gave rise to the " sharp contention " between Paul and Barnabas on the question whether Mark should accompany them on the second missionary journey. " Barnabas was minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark. But Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from the other, and Barnabas took Mark with him, and sailed away unto Cyprus " (Acts xv. 37-39).

Yet ten years or so later, we find St Mark again

[1] J. M. C. Crum, *Roadmending on the Sacred Way*, pp. 42, 43.

with St Paul at Rome during the latter's first imprisonment. And that Paul had recovered confidence in him is seen from his request, written during his second imprisonment, to Timothy: "Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is useful to me for ministering" (2 Tim. iv. 11). And a year or so later, perhaps after St Paul's death, St Peter writes: "The Church that is in Babylon (Rome), elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark my son" (1 Pet. v. 13).

St Mark's Gospel is of such primary importance that it is right to lay this stress upon his qualifications to be the mouthpiece of Apostolic tradition. There at Jerusalem he had the opportunity, during the first great days, of hearing the Apostles and first disciples, both men and women, tell of their experience with Jesus. Thus he drank deep of the oral tradition of the first eye-witnesses. And then later he was the intimate companion both of St Peter and St Paul. He stands at the centre and the first spring of Apostolic Christianity.

It is legitimate to see behind St Mark's story the authority of St Peter. This emerges in the Gospel in the vividness and realism of the story, which contains many touches which reflect the memory of an eye-witness. One of the main agreements among modern scholars has been to find in St Mark that which reproduces most closely and graphically the character and personality of Jesus—the look on His face, the tones of His voice, His gestures, and so on. The Gospel contains narrative which has the evident quality that it allows us to see the

original scene as originally witnessed. No better instance of this can be furnished than the scene where the woman who had an issue of blood came in the crowd behind Jesus and touched His garment (Mark v. 25 ff.), or the healing of the man with the withered arm, where Jesus " looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart " (iii. 1 ff.).

That such features mean that St Mark heard St Peter tell the story of his experience with Jesus is probable almost to the point of certainty. Certainly the Gospel narrative becomes all the more telling and vivid if it is read on the supposition that we are looking at our Lord and at the days of His ministry through the eyes of St Peter.

In this connection it is interesting to note the great candour of the story in its reference to St Peter. As has been said : " St Peter is hardly once mentioned as an individual in the pages of St Mark except in terms of rebuke or of disgrace." [1] This is thoroughly in keeping with the fundamental character of St Peter's experience. He of all men would never tire of telling how the Gospel, which they preached and others received, sprang from no achievement of theirs as followers of Jesus, but rather out of God's action supervening upon their uttermost failure. It is nearly certain then that St Mark gives us the faithful impression of how St Peter took the Christians at Rome back into the days of the ministry. We can imagine

[1] Dr A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, p. xxviii.

them asking the Apostles how things had been at the start. "Tell us of your time with the Lord. How did it all begin, and by what steps did your experience with Him develop? How did He come to die? Tell us the dramatic story which led up to His death. Tell us its main stages!"

As to the date of the Gospel there is a general agreement among scholars that it lies between A.D. 65 and 67. Tradition, as expressed by Irenæus, suggests that the book was written after the deaths of St Peter and St Paul in the persecution under the Emperor Nero. This persecution broke out in A.D. 64. On the other hand, the evidence of chapter xiii. points to the Gospel having been written before the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The evidence shows that persecution had begun which "is interpreted as being only the beginning of the 'travail pangs' of the New Age, but the end is not yet."

In reading the Gospel the terrible circumstances of its origin must be borne in mind. It is written to reinforce the faith and witness of a persecuted Church. Tacitus tells us of the persecution of Nero. A fire in A.D. 64 had broken out and had destroyed much of Rome, and the rumour had spread that Nero himself was the incendiary. "Therefore," writes Tacitus, "to dispel the report Nero made a scapegoat of others, and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, whom the populace called Christians. The Christus from whom the name had its origin had been executed during the

reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate. The mischievous superstition was thus checked for the moment, but was reviving again, not only in Judæa, the original seat of the evil, but even in the capital, where all that is anywhere hideous or loathsome finds its centre and flourishes. Accordingly some were first put on trial; they pleaded guilty, and upon information gathered from them, a large number were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as because of their hatred of humanity. Wanton cruelty marked their execution. Covered with the skins of beasts they were torn in pieces by dogs, and thus perished; many were crucified, or burned alive, and even set on fire to serve as an illumination by night after daylight had expired" (Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44).

Such circumstances must, we repeat, be borne in mind in reading the Gospel. They throw incidental light on the figure of St Peter. The Gospel could tell in unrelieved starkness the record of his weakness and failure, for the humiliation and shame of the past had been washed out not only by his apostleship, but by that apostleship being sealed in the blood of martyrdom. But the value of the whole Gospel is heightened by the circumstances of its being written to a martyr-Church. For this intensifies the meaning of the Gospel's main theme: and that is the treading by Jesus of the way of the Cross. The climax of the story is the death of Jesus. But in that death was Gospel —good news—for those overshadowed by the darkness of death.

CHAPTER IV

THE MARCAN DRAMA

We have then to apprehend the main course of the Marcan story. Nothing is more important in the understanding of the New Testament than to seize the dramatic movement in the story, as it mounts to the tragic climax of Calvary. To do so is not to claim, as has already been allowed, that St Mark furnishes materials for a chronologically accurate "life" of Jesus. Yet the story has an order, a course, a unity. That this is so is not only self-evident, but is enforced by the fact that the writers of the first and third Gospels, speaking generally, preserve the Marcan order. They found in it some main structure into which they arranged other material. St Luke brings out with additional clearness the fundamental character of St Mark as a drama which moves to a culminating hour. For he adds to St Mark a large section of material which is peculiar to himself. That material has as its chief theme the incidents of the last journey of Jesus from Galilee with His "face set stedfastly to go to Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 51; cf. xii. 50; xiii. 33).

So St Mark should be read with the question in mind: How did Jesus come to the supreme

hour at Jerusalem—how did He come to die? There is little teaching of Jesus in the Gospel. It is mainly concerned with what happened, and above all with what happened at Jerusalem, where the Cross was set up which afterwards became the burning centre of the good news preached and received—the banner under which the fierce battle of the faith was fought often unto death.

It must be remembered here and in reading the other Evangelists, that the story of what happened is also the story of what happened to the followers of Jesus. It is the story of their experience, of how they came to see Him die. The Gospel drama is that which was printed on their minds and souls and was then conveyed to others. That is how the picture or portrait of Jesus was given to the world. The medium of portraiture was the minds of His followers, above all of His most intimate disciples. That there is in existence, on the page of history, the vivid clear-cut picture of Jesus is due to His personality being vividly and sharply impressed upon the minds of His followers. It is immensely important to remember this. For the drama of which the climax was the Cross plainly shows that the reflecting or reproducing medium, that is the minds of the disciples, was clouded and thrown into confusion by the on-coming and arrival of the hour of tragedy. Those who followed Jesus were caught in a movement which, as it relentlessly advanced, they could not understand and in which, in the end, they could take no part. How, then, did they come to

record it ? How did it come to be the substance of a good news for them and for others ? To these questions there must be a return when the main stages of the drama, as given by St Mark, have been traced (see p. 256, Chapter VII).

There are four main stages or acts in the drama :

I. i. 14 to iii. The early ministry in Galilee : the preaching to all who will hear.

II. iv. to viii. 30. The training of the followers : the teaching in parables.

III. viii. 31 to x. The going up to Jerusalem.

IV. xi. to end. Jerusalem : the Passion.

But before the beginning at i. 14, when " after that John (the Baptist) was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God," there are the introductory verses to be attended to. They are of great importance. They refer to (*a*) The Ministry of John the Baptist ; (*b*) The Baptism of Jesus ; (*c*) The Temptation in the Wilderness.

The ministry of John the Baptist is the all-significant link between the Old Testament and the New. In him as prophet, who is yet only the forerunner of Another mightier than he (i. 7), the cardinal faith and expectation of the Old Testament, smouldering during the long generations since the exile, break into flame. The whole atmosphere into which Jesus enters is thus heavily charged with " coming." The supreme

hour so long waited for by Israel is at hand. The Day of the Lord is in arrival.

Jesus, emerging from the obscurity of Nazareth in Galilee, identifies Himself with the mission of John. He is "baptized of John in Jordan." He receives a vision and hears a voice from heaven: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus the baptism marks for Jesus a crisis in which He recognizes and is consecrated to His mission as Messiah—as the One chosen of God to bring in His kingdom.

It is relatively to this Messianic consciousness that Jesus is tempted ("straightway the Spirit driveth Him forth into the wilderness," i. 12): though for the content of the temptation we have to go to the other Evangelists. St Mark merely records the fact.

I. So "after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel . . . and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel" (i. 14, 15).

Thus the Marcan account of the drama of the ministry begins. The first three chapters give the impression of how rapidly the drama developed. They bring in, as it were on the stage, the various elements in the drama. There is the calling and the following of the first disciples (i. 16): there is the sensation caused by the authoritative teaching of Jesus (i. 22): there is the violent reaction to Him of the spirits or demons: there is the attraction

to Him at once of the multitudes, owing to His singular powers: there is the rapid development of hostility to Him on the part of religious officials

As regards the calling of the first disciples, we should think of them as drawn to Jesus by His announcement—as of a herald—the great announcement of the coming of the great Day of God. It was that for which Jews alive in faith and expectation should have been ready, despite the disappointment of delay. In those who responded to the call of Jesus, coming as He did after John the Baptist and taking up his message, the essential faith of Israel in the God of covenant and promise was embodied. In them the essential faith of the Old Testament found living expression. It was upon this faith that Jesus built. It was that faith which drew them to the Master, and not any clear understanding as to who He was. They followed Him as prophet—as the bringer of the great message of the coming to fulfilment of the faith of Israel. That was the starting-point of their discipleship, from which they were led forward. It was "the preaching of good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ . . . which was published throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached" (Acts x. 36, 37).

Here, too, is the starting-place for those who would get as near as possible to Jesus of Nazareth —to the Jesus of history, as the saying is. They may not know where they stand as regards the Christ of creeds and of dogma. They may well

wish to try the hypothesis that Jesus was really no more than a prophet; that is, no more than just another man among men. Here, then, at this point, let them start, hearing the announcement of Jesus which was primarily not about Himself but about the unseen God and His Kingdom—hearing and following in the company of the men who left their fishing-nets and "went after Jesus."

As regards the reaction upon Jesus of the spirits, the sensation produced and the popularity aroused by His powers, we have to notice the remarkable attitude of reserve which He adopted. As He moves from place to place, and is surrounded at once by multitudes which come after Him—"All are seeking thee," says Simon (i. 37)—He refuses to be popularly exploited as a wonder-worker. After healing the leper "He sternly charged him and straightway sent him out and said unto him: See thou say nothing to any man" (i. 43 f.).

Thus the loneliness of Jesus at once appears. He has a way to pursue which is His own, and is other than that which others expect Him to follow. That is part of the drama. He moves among thronging crowds, but with a purpose deeper than can be satisfied by their enthusiasm. He has to hold away from their embrace. His stern injunctions are disregarded: the leper "went out and began to publish it much, and to spread abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without

in desert places : and they came to him from every quarter " (i. 45).

We get then the dramatic picture of the Master, charged with the message which carries Him from place to place—(" Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also," i. 38) —holding on His own way through the excited throngs, and accompanied by a few followers. But there is the other element in the drama. It is that of suspicion and hostility. Almost at once it appears. In the house at Capernaum, which was so crowded that the bearers of the man sick of the palsy could not get near to him, " there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts " (ii. 6). Scene following upon scene shows the swift development of antagonism to Jesus on the part of the Pharisees. Jesus brings with Him a wine which burst the old wine-skins of contemporary religious practice. Things come to a crisis in a synagogue where " they watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day . . . and when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth : and his hand was restored. And the Pharisees went out and straightway with the Herodians took counsel against him, how they might destroy him " (iii. 1-6).

Thus, and very rapidly—no doubt with the rapidity of that which is viewed in a foreshortening perspective—the drama develops. Jesus meets

the threat of danger by withdrawal to the Sea of Galilee. He takes measures to prevent being overwhelmed by the crowd. "And he spake to his disciples that a little boat should wait on him because of the crowd, lest they should throng Him: for he had healed many" (iii. 9-10). He pursues His way with determination. He takes decisive action as regards His followers. "And he goeth up into the mountain, and calleth unto him whom he himself would: and they went unto him. And he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (iii. 13-14).

Thus He drives forward unrelentingly. There is a tenseness which can be felt in the quickly-developing drama. He seems to His friends to be "beside himself" (iii. 21). The way He has to go carries Him beyond the confines and control of His home. There is a decisive hour which makes plain that He is concerned with a wider family. "And there come his mother and his brethren; and standing without (the crowd) they sent unto him calling him. And a multitude was sitting about him; and they say unto him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answereth them, and saith, Who is my mother and my brethren? And looking round on them which sat round about him, He saith, Behold my mother and my brethren? For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother" (iii. 31-35).

Such is the first act or stage of the ministry as

told by St Mark—as told by St Peter to him. It is essentially a moving picture. Movement onwards dominates the story. The followers are swept forward in the wake of Jesus. He is hindered by the pressure upon Him of the excited crowds. He is opposed by the flat antagonism of the religious officials—" And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils " (iii. 22). But He holds on His way. At all costs He goes forward.

CHAPTER V

THE MARCAN DRAMA—*continued*

II. The beginning of the second act or stage in the ministry of Jesus is marked by the parable of the Sower. It seems that a new method of teaching was adopted by Jesus, which was in harmony with His purpose to concentrate His attention upon His followers, rather than continue to broadcast the announcement of the Kingdom for anyone to receive who heard it. The parable of the Sower summarizes His experience as herald of the Kingdom. For the most part His message had fallen as seed on unfavourable soil, but in a minority of cases it had alighted on good ground, in which it would grow to yield a great harvest. With that remnant He is now concerned. For time is short. He is already overshadowed by the intention of the offended authorities to do away with Him (iii. 6).

So He adopts a method of teaching which makes demands on His hearers. It requires the attention and thought which will pierce the surface meaning of a parable and seize its inner significance. The word has to take deep root in the mind and heart, not lie idly on their surface. So He set Himself to give the mystery of the Kingdom of God to His

handful of followers. They are His "brethren" who have responded to the summons of the Will of God. They have heard to some effect, and to them He has more to impart. For he that hath, to him shall be given (iv. 24, 25). The subject of this further teaching is the Kingdom. The Kingdom is something hidden but about to be manifested: it is already present in germ, according to the fructifying purpose of God which proceeds without men knowing how: it is already in arrival. Its beginnings are minute, like the planting of a tiny seed, but the outcome is to be great and far-reaching (iv. 21-33).

This, then, is the main significance of this stage in the ministry. The concern of Jesus is the training of His few followers. It is this that gives some measure of unity to the story, which otherwise is lacking in any obvious connection. The features of the earlier stage recur. The multitude constantly surges round Him (*e.g.* v. 21, 31; vi. 33). He is watched by the religious officials, some of whom had come down from Jerusalem for the purpose. They find additional ground for hostility to Him in His disregard of the tradition of the elders (vii. 1). On the other hand, that the danger threatening Him is likely to come not only from the religious, but also from the civic authorities, is brought home by the fate of John the Baptist at the hand of King Herod (vi. 14 ff.). There are also further manifestations of His powers. They present a challenge to our minds—the calming of the storm, the walking on the sea,

the feedings of the multitude—but they did something of the same sort to the minds of His followers (iv. 41 ; v. 22 ; vi. 51 ; viii. 17). At any rate they are not exploited by Jesus so as to compel conviction. He is limited in what He can do by the lack of faith among His own people at Nazareth (vi. 1 ff.). He puts from Him the invitation to produce a sign to convince the unbelieving (viii. 11). For His purpose is deeper than can be achieved by wonder or excitement. He pursues it, endeavouring the while to escape from the thronging crowds and to suppress His notoriety. Thus He is found outside Galilee in Gentile territory, away on the borders of Tyre and Sidon. "He would have no man know it, but he could not be hid" (vii. 24). He returns to the east side of the Lake, through the midst of the borders of Decapolis (vii. 31), thus avoiding Galilee. He charges those who bring a deaf-and-dumb man to Him that they should tell no man of the cure. "But the more He charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it" (vii. 36).

Yet the purpose on which He is set goes forward. This stage in the ministry issues in the demonstration that His followers attain to a deeper apprehension of it than the crowd or the indignant officials. Not only had they been with Him on His long journeys, but they themselves had had the adventurous experience of being sent out by His authority to preach and to heal (vi. 7). So the memorable scene is reached, in the middle of one of the walking-tours, when the little company

is near Cæsarea Philippi, once more in Gentile territory: "In the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Who do men say that I am?" They repeat the varying popular speculations. "And they told him, saying, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, one of the prophets. And he asked them, But who say ye that I am? Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him (viii. 27 ff.).

This acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah—the Chosen of God to bring in His Kingdom—marks a decisive stage in the story. The seed, which could not grow elsewhere, has struck root in the heart of Peter and yields this notable fruit. The acknowledgment must be understood in connection with the announcement that the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand. A Jew is found who fully believes what is announced. But not only so, he sees in his Master, fugitive and threatened though He be, the King to be manifested when the hour of the Kingdom strikes. Here is Jewish faith and expectation, rooted and grounded in the living God, at its highest level of attainment. The response which Jesus set Himself to win from His people—the readiness really to believe that the divine covenant with Israel, and the divine purpose of God in history, were in fulfilment—is attained. To him that hath has been given. The mystery of the Kingdom is no longer in Jesus' possession alone, but is shared by others. Yet

there is more to be given and to be received. The mystery is deeper yet.

III. So the third stage of the drama opens at once with the disclosure by Jesus of what the future, big with birth, is to bring forth. "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected . . . and be killed" (viii. 31).

From this point onwards the story is dominated by the tragic climax at Jerusalem towards which it drives. The movement quickens, the tensity of the drama deepens. The immediate result, which persists to the end, is that the central Figure in the drama stands out ahead of His companions, separated from them by their inability to understand that to which He moves forward. That the hour of the Kingdom of God could bring suffering and death to His Messiah is to them inconceivable. The first announcement of such a thing is vehemently repudiated by Peter. But the repudiation is silenced by a yet more vehement rebuke, which is, so to say, shot out of the heart of the Master under the pressure of temptation. "And Peter took him and began to rebuke him. But he turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (viii. 33).

Thus the separation opens wide between Jesus and His men. It has essentially to do with "the things of God" which are conceived of differently

by Him and by them. The distance or separation is never closed, not even by the tremendous endorsement of the Messiahship of Jesus, which is given to the inner ring of His followers on the Mount of Transfiguration (ix. 1). The experience leaves them "questioning among themselves." They do receive an answer to one of their questions. If Jesus is the Christ, has He been preceded by the expected forerunner? "The scribes say that Elijah must first come" (ix. 11). The reply is that in John the Baptist Elijah has come and it enforces still further that all is in fulfilment. Yet the disciples remain unable to understand that which the Master goes to meet. He tells them what to expect. "But they understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask him" (ix. 32). It is inconceivable and beyond them.

So a procession is formed, heading steadily to Jerusalem. One little passage serves to throw it before our vision in sharpest relief. The figures in it stand out dramatically defined. The chief figure, ahead, and the rest following behind: "And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem: and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed (or, as they followed they) were afraid" (x. 32).

So it is to the end. They are never level with Him, never possessed of His mind. So He and that which draws Him forward become more mysterious to them. No follower of His opens his mouth from Cæsarea Philippi onwards but to illustrate this. Every word betrays an increasing

incapacity to understand. So they dispute in the way who was the greatest (ix. 33 ff.): so they would drive the children away (x. 13 ff.): so they are astounded at entrance into the coming Kingdom being difficult for the rich (x. 23 ff.): so they ask for seats at the right hand and on the left in the glory which they still believe is about to arrive (x. 35 ff.): so they greet Jerusalem as the embodiment of all that is lasting and secure (xiii. 2): so they grumble at the extravagance of the woman with the cruse of ointment of spikenard very precious (xiv. 3 ff.): so they protest that nothing, not even dying, shall separate them from Him (xiv. 27 ff.). Thus they are drawn forward to that which is beyond them, to that which nevertheless arrives.

IV. The drama comes to its climax at Jerusalem. The last act is opened by a break in the lowering and ominous clouds which had gathered over the heads of the Master and His followers. For a moment all seems to be coming right. For He, whom they believe to be the Messiah, enters into Jerusalem in royal triumph, and is greeted with cries which vibrate with expectation—"Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed is the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest" (xi. 9). But the bright sunlight of that happy hour passes. The clouds close again and the night rushes on. Jerusalem is found to be as a fig-tree with the appearance but without the reality

of fruit. Its central shrine is as a den of robbers. Nothing happens in fulfilment of the Entry. For some days the movement of the drama pauses as Jesus goes in and out of Jerusalem from Bethany. There are occasions of fencing and parrying with priests, scribes, Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees (chapters xi. and xii.). But at last the Passover draws near and the hour of destiny strikes. The gathered storm breaks and the darkness falls. We can catch sight in the gloom of companions unable to watch with Jesus at the finally critical hour. We have a glimpse of their fugitive figures. ("And they all left him and fled," xiv. 50.) We can hear a broken man sobbing in the night. ("And Peter called to mind the word, how that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept," xiv. 72.)

But the drama moves by them, leaving them broken. It moves and reaches its end. It bears Jesus forward surrendered to His fate: it brings Him to the Cross. And there He hangs in silence and darkness, till "at the ninth hour he cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (xv. 34).

Nothing was left for anyone to do but to ask for the poor broken body (xv. 43) to lay it in a grave, and to express the pathos and powerlessness of grief by bringing spices with which to anoint it (xvi. 1).

CHAPTER VI

THE MEANING OF THE DRAMA

St Mark's story—the "main line" account of the experiences of the men who followed Jesus—leads to the tragic climax of Calvary. The story, and this is true of the four Gospels as a whole, moves like a river. Its course is serene at first. But later the flow of the water becomes swifter, as it hastens towards some decisive point; till finally it rushes headlong in cataract over a precipice.

It is well for anyone who wishes to understand the New Testament to realize how black was the darkness into which their following of Jesus brought the disciples. For then he will get a firm grasp upon the Gospel which nevertheless was the outcome of the drama. He will understand how the narrative of the ministry of Jesus, mounting as it does to the hour of unintelligible catastrophe, is related to the faith with which the whole of the rest of the New Testament resounds. But he must put out a determined effort of his imagination that he may strip the Cross of its usual associations. The Cross is full to saturation point of that message of victory and com-

fort which has spoken home to generations of Christians.

> "The Cross! It takes our guilt away;
> It holds the fainting spirit up;
> It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
> And sweetens every bitter cup.
>
> It makes the coward's spirit brave,
> And nerves the feeble arm for fight;
> It takes the terror from the grave,
> And gilds the bed of death with light."

The lines are representative of the place which the Cross holds in the minds of men. But it was utterly otherwise with the minds of the followers of Jesus at the hour of His death. For them the Cross was the concentrated summary of the terrifying mystery of evil.

It is well, let it be said again, to try to understand this. For life is such that faith in God and His providence has again and again to stand the assault of tragic facts which seem to give it the lie direct. If the verdict of the soul of man upon his existence is broadly reviewed, as it has been expressed by those most capable of speaking from the depths of experience, it is evident that an optimistic interpretation of life is mortally assailed by pessimism. To sensitive souls the dread conclusion has again and again forced its way home that

> "the world which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Has really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain ;
And we are here as on a darkling plain,
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night." [1]

This is a representative voice, through which an unassuageable sadness in the heart of mankind finds utterance. No doubt another note is struck by the faith of the Old Testament. *There*, indeed, is some unique secret of optimism. But, as we have seen (see pp. 169 ff., chapters xix. and xx.), the faith of Israel came to a deadlock in face of the mystery of evil. It had, springing from its heart, questioning and doubt about God which it could not pacify. It could not reconcile the goodness of God with the evil in life. Nor could it find any secret carrying peace to the guilty, discordant souls of men. And it had nothing with which it could fully defy the dread finality of death.

Such is the world, such the human travail in it. Into it Jesus came. What He did was to lead the men, in whom He found Jewish faith most alive, to the hour which gathered up into itself with the utmost intensity the whole mysterious riddle of existence. He said nothing to explain or mitigate the tragic elements in life. He took life as it is. He saw it mounting to an hour of supreme decision. He set Himself to meet and be present at that hour. When it struck it brought darkness —the darkness which hides God, rendered all the more dense by the entirely confiding trustfulness of Jesus. It brought despair to His followers,

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Dover Beach*.

sundered by their own impotence from their Master and convicted of sin. It brought the horror and triumph of death.

This is the Cross seen in its starkness.

Yet the Cross became the central manifestation of the Love of God. *This is the paradox which is the inmost essence of the New Testament.* It is the paradox that the hour of darkness, of the silence of heaven, of the bondage of sin, of the supremacy of death, was nevertheless the hour of light, of God unveiled, of man delivered, of death swallowed up in victory.

Nothing accounts for this but the Resurrection and that which followed upon it. Behind the whole of the New Testament is the witness of the men to that by which they were born again into hope and faith (1 Pet. i. 3). To be an apostle was to be a witness to the Resurrection (Acts i. 22). It was the Resurrection which began the disciples' possession of—their being possessed by—a good news of God in Christ. At the very root of the Christian Gospel lies the great Act of God by which the Cross was transformed from darkness to light, from defeat to victory.

There are two massively certain facts in the New Testament,—one the dying of Jesus upon the Cross in a fashion which raised to their highest power all the questions about God which have ever assailed the hearts of men; the other the carrying of the Cross into the world as the central essence of God's self-revelation. If anyone is so persuaded that Jesus was no more than just

another man, living and dying; if anyone is so persuaded that the supernatural intervention of God is an impossibility, then he will never be able to show how the two main certainties of the New Testament are related to each other. The Gospel narrative will for him fall apart from the Christian faith of the Acts and the Epistles. A gulf will open between the Jesus of the ministry and the Christ of the rest of the New Testament.

But all is knit together into a luminously significant unity once it is acknowledged that the Crucifixion, which seemed to lead to nothing, did, nevertheless, usher in the Day of God and of His Kingdom. The events which followed upon the death of Jesus—namely His Rising, His Ascension to the right hand of God, His coming again in the Spirit to live and work in His Church—constituted that Gospel of God in self-revealing, self-vindicating action, of which the remainder of the New Testament is overflowingly full. It was the Gospel of God, so arriving, which threw back a transforming light upon the life of Jesus and its culmination in what seemed irretrievable disaster. The human figure of Jesus, living a life of obedience towards the unseen Father, was thus seen as transfigured. For in Him, "Who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection" (Rom. i. 4), the Father Himself was seen to be manifested. And the death of Jesus, where there seemed to be concentrated all that speaks of God's absence, was seen to be the very revelation of God's presence and God's love.

The New Testament can never be rightly understood by those who do not appreciate the breathless wonder which beats through its varied witness to the supreme fact that *there*—just there —where God seemed to be not, there He was finally revealed. That wonder is equally in the Petrine—" Who through Christ are believers in God, which raised him from the dead and gave him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God " (1 Pet. i. 21): as in the Johannine— " Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins " (1 John iv. 10): and as in the Pauline—" We preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than man; and the weakness of God is stronger than men " (1 Cor. i. 23-25).

Here is what we have called the basic Gospel of God possessed by the believing body, within which the gospel narratives were written and received. We can understand then how those narratives are related to the Gospel implied by the Epistles. In themselves they do not contain the Gospel but only lead up to it. By itself St Mark does not explain itself. It contains little more than the story of a human life shrouded in the end by the dark mystery of death. That is one way of reading the story. But the other and the full way is to read it not by itself, but in the light of that which

to the death of Jesus led, namely the coming through to man of the Father's love *in* Jesus Christ, His Son. That light, cast back on the story, illuminates its whole course with a meaning not realized during its course. The life, the death of Jesus are thus seen to be ablaze with the glory of God. His humanity is seen transfigured by His deity. It is as though a transparent picture were viewed first against a black background and then when that background is replaced by brilliant light. The light transfigures every detail of the picture. So the life of Jesus may first be viewed against the impenetrable darkness of His death; and then it may be seen with the light of divine glory shining through it.

It is in this way that we can understand how the gospel narratives—we speak of the first three—just contain the bare story of the ministry, bare of scarcely any interpreting comment. For the interpreting meaning of the story was there in the minds alike of writer and readers. That is what, as we have seen, St Luke so clearly says (Luke i. 1-4). The truth of God Incarnate in Jesus Christ was there to give meaning to the story which led up to its disclosure. It did not need to be expounded. It would be taken for granted.

This feature of the narratives, their bareness of theological comment, has misled many people. They have tried to treat the story of the human life of Jesus as the real kernel of Christianity, whilst the faith of the Epistles and the theology of God revealed in Him has been relegated to the sphere

of subsequent human speculation. But the story of the human life can never stand by itself, just because it raises an issue deeper than itself, namely, the great question of God. It can only stand and disclose its meaning as seen to lead up to the illumination of the central mystery of God by the light of His glory shining on the face of His Son.

Yet while we are bound to read the Gospel story in the light of the faith which it presupposes, we shall do well to treasure its bareness. For that is evidence of its faithful historical character. It means that those who told it were bent on witnessing to what really happened, rather than on composing a theological picture. So they told others of the days when they followed Jesus not knowing who He was, yet certain that He truly was their brother and master. So they preserved and passed on the picture of Jesus and of His really human personality. So they have enabled subsequent generations to "see Jesus," as He lived and suffered and died in the days of His flesh.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE AND THE INCARNATION

It will be well to draw out at greater length the way in which the story of the life of Jesus in the flesh has to be read in two ways. First we follow its course in the company of the men who followed Jesus, not knowing who He was. We are drawn forward with them along the way which led at last to Calvary, where Jesus their Brother, their Master, had been separated from them by the darkness of His doom. Secondly, we look back upon the same story as it is transformed and illuminated by the light of that which swallowed up His death in victory.

It is well, we repeat, to dwell on this point, for it has to do with the crucially central question, which above all others has to be faced and decisively answered, namely, whether the real core of Christianity is only a human life, which has been buried and hidden under a mass of subsequent theological attributes. In other words the right way to read the Gospels has to do with nothing less than the truth of the Incarnation.

There is a potent attractiveness in the modern method of stripping the personality of Jesus and the story of His ministry bare of doctrinal and

theological meaning. It is harmony with the desire of a scientific age to get at the real facts, real history. It accords with the tendency to arrive at conclusions by a real induction from facts, rather than by making facts agree with conclusions brought to bear upon them deductively. People have supposed that they had to read into the story of Jesus, all the time and at every point, the orthodox belief in the Incarnation. It has been an exciting adventure—a new experience—to set aside the belief and to read the story undoctrinally. It has meant a recovery of hold upon the really human personality of one whom doctrinal presentations had made unreal. So far so good.

Yet nothing is more certain than that this method of understanding Jesus and His ministry yields, by itself, no alternative to the Gospel of God, whereof the very centre is the Incarnation. Modern "humanitarian" studies of Jesus, which set out to reduce Him to being just another man living and dying, are marked, for all their vividness and realism, by a fundamental inconclusiveness. They lack some main secret of coherence. The figure of Him whom they seek to portray proves elusive. The unity of His personality breaks up under examination. So it comes about that such students often become strangely susceptible to the suggestion that, after all, no really historical Jesus ever existed. Or, if that suggestion is set aside, they are driven—as Mr Bernard Shaw has been driven—to explain all in Jesus that transcends the

level of ordinary humanity by saying that He was a madman. In fact these modern studies of Jesus of Nazareth, which begin with Him as the man and the brother and stop short at His death, reproduce most significantly that sense of mystery in Jesus which was in the minds of the men who followed Him, and there grew deeper and darker until, in the end, He was caught away from them and enveloped in impenetrable darkness.

For to follow the course of the ministry, confining the study to St Mark, is to follow a trail of questions which sprang up as Jesus went among them. On all sides it is evident that men received Him as their fellow-man, yet all the more is it remarkable how they reacted on Him with questioning expressive of sense that He went beyond what they expected of Him as their fellow-man.

At the very outset at Capernaum in the synagogue those who heard Him " were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this ? a new teaching ! with authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits and they obey him " (Mark i. 27). So certain of the scribes sitting by, when the man sick of the palsy was let down through the roof, " reasoned in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak ? he blasphemeth : Who can forgive sins but one, even God " (ii. 6, 7). So the questions multiply —" Why do John's disciples and the disciples and the Pharisees fast, and thy disciples fast not ? " (ii. 18). " Behold, why do they (the disciples) on

the Sabbath day that which is not lawful ? " (ii. 24). These questions come from those who are hostile to Jesus, but the like come from those nearer to Him. . . . " His friends went out to lay hold of him : for they said, He is beside himself " (iii. 21). His disciples in the boat " feared exceedingly, and said one to another, Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him ? " (iv. 41). They cry out so naturally —" Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me ? " (v. 31). And in His own country the folks to whom He was long familiar, " were astonished, saying, Whence hath this man these things ? What is the wisdom that is given unto this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by his hands ? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon ? And are not his sisters here with us ? " (vi. 2, 3).

Thus scene follows scene in which astonishment is set up in this or that group of people around Jesus. We are here upon the track of those elements in Jesus, upon which we laid little stress in the rapid review which we gave of the course of the drama mounting to Calvary. Yet they are not to be avoided. They are integral to the story. They have to do with His tremendous claims— to forgive sins, to reinterpret the Law given through Moses, to be Himself the supreme factor in the judgment to be passed on individual lives. They have to do with the authority with which He spoke about the Father. They have to do

with His extraordinary powers and with that unique absence in Him of any note of self-accusation in regard to sin. The more such elements are allowed to take their place in Jesus as we follow with Him up to the Cross, the deeper the mystery which shrouds Him going to His death. For His fate seems to confute His claims and His powers. "He who saved others, himself he cannot save" (Mark xv. 31)—that is just the terribly true taunt which could be thrown in His face. He could only be the helpless victim who before was the figure of commanding royalty.

So He went away from men, so to say turning His back on them and leaving them. So He passed into the darkness and silence of His end, veiled in the mystery of which the successive unanswered questions are the evidence. And if that was the end then there is no penetration of the mystery except the supposition that He was deluded or mad.

In this way we see, once more, how the story of the ministry, followed through to the Cross, has in itself no coherent meaning—no gospel. But in this way also we see, once more, how the darkness of the mystery was made luminous and transparent by that which supervened upon the Cross. In the light of the Resurrection we see all transformed. Above all we see Jesus anew. He is no longer the figure going away from men shrouded in unanswered questions. But He is the figure coming out toward men unveiled in the full plenitude of His glory. He is the Son come forth

from the Father. And so seen—and that is how His followers saw Him—the things which gave rise to questioning about Him fall into their place. They harmonize with that which He was declared to be by His Resurrection from the dead. They are the revelation of His Sonship. His claims, His powers, His authority, His unique relationship to sin have their significant place in Him upon whose face the glory of God is seen to shine. They are part of the Gospel of the good news of God, who was in Him reconciling the world unto Himself.

Thus we see once more how there is no whole or coherent view of Jesus or of the story of His life except in the light of the revelation of God in Him. It was only that which supervened upon the Crucifixion which brought into existence a mind capable of portraying Jesus. Otherwise the minds of the disciples would have remained fogged and darkened by the darkness of Calvary. That there was ever in them a mental mirror, clear enough to reflect the brilliant personality of Jesus, was due to that which "God wrought when He raised Him from the dead." And this alone accounts for there being at the heart of the New Testament what we have called (p. 217, end of Chapter II), a "dominant, central and unifying influence"; namely, the mind of the Apostolic men, the eye-witnesses, which the tremendous drama of the life and death, the rising and the reigning of Jesus had wrought into a unity or wholeness of vision and apprehension.

This reminds us once more how in fact the

portraiture of Jesus, the story of His ministry—in a word, the Gospel narratives—were the product of the believing Church. They were not produced to create but to feed a faith already in existence. And that faith was the outcome not of the life of Jesus but of that to which His life was but preparatory, namely the self-revealing action of God in the Resurrection, the Ascension and the coming of the Spirit. For men who possessed that faith and by men who possessed that faith the Gospel narratives were compiled. For their common possession—their faith in the Son come forth from the Father—gave full meaning to the life of Jesus "in the days of His flesh." Thus they, too, knew who it was whom men followed, not knowing whom they followed. Thus they read back into the preparatory days the meaning of their outcome. Thus the story of the ministry of Jesus was to them a part of the Gospel of God.

So we come round again to the doctrinal way of reading the Gospel narrative and to the doctrinal interpretation of its central figure. That which was stripped from the figure of the Master is replaced. It is seen to be the only coherent interpretation of Him. We read the St Mark's Gospel again in accordance with its title—"the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (i. 1).

But we ought to do so with a great jealousy for the real humanity of Him who took our human nature. We should be on our guard against the habit of the devotional mind so to magnify and

exalt the deity of Jesus as to obscure and minimize His humanity. We should be chary of attributing to Him in the days of His flesh all those attributes which begin with omni—omnipotence, omniscience—which we suppose are the attributes of God.

What we have to do is to keep our gaze firmly fixed on the humanity of Jesus. For it is in that transfigured humanity that we see the revelation of God. The divine is to be found within the human. As a great teacher has said: "There is no point at which we can leave go, as it were, of the human nature and reach out for something beyond it to be called divine. The divine is to be seen within the human. The divine revelation is made through the transfigured flesh. Go nearer and nearer, the Gospel says, to your brother Jesus, and you draw nearer and nearer to the Lord Christ. Press closer and closer to that humanity, and lo! you find yourself adoring your God." [1]

This means a great and sustained loyalty to that real limitation of the life of the Incarnate Son, of which the Gospel narratives, with their wonderful fidelity to facts, are evidence. They allow us to place ourselves right alongside the real Master whom Peter and the others followed. As the same teacher says: "It was our flesh that He became in concrete, historical, literal actuality. He took it in the exact form in which it stood at a certain date, in a certain place, amid a certain environment. He discarded nothing. He suspended

[1] H. S. Holland, *Facts of the Faith*, p. 99.

nothing, He abhorred nothing which came to Him through the virgin womb. He shut Himself up within our limitations: He confined Himself to our precise conditions: He allowed Himself no selection, no liberties, no exceptions, no privileges. He took upon Him our ignorances. He was enclosed within our narrow experiences. He felt His way forward by experiment, under all the reserves and restraints that are man's natural heritage and belong to his mode of development. In everything, except sin, He was a man touched with the spirit of our infirmities. The natural, normal environment of His birth and growth sufficed Him for His great task. Through it, in it, not travelling outside it by one hairbreadth, He lifted it into the light of eternity, by making it the material through which to display His absolute and eternal relationship to God the Father. He made its scanty resources afford to Him sufficient opportunity for manifesting how man can verify his divine sonship. Every fresh proof of the narrowness of the limitations under which He worked is a new witness to the triumph of His achievement" [1]

All this is in full harmony with the New Testament, which saw in the entire coming-down of God to man the full measure of His Love. It is never afraid of the sheer humanity of Jesus, nor of His entire identification with human lot. "Have this mind in you," it cries, "which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 278, 279.

God (or originally God) counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross" (Phil. ii. 5-8).

CHAPTER VIII

THE ACTS

We have seen that it is only the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ His Son, which gives meaning and coherence to the narratives of the ministry. We have seen also that that good news must be found as underlying the rest of the New Testament. It constituted "the faith once delivered to the Saints." It was in the minds of those who wrote of those who read the story of Jesus. But we must now point out that that faith was not apprehended in its fullness at once, but only by successive stages. Nor that at the very first preaching the Gospel was anything less than that of the salvation brought out by God Himself. Only its full meaning and range were not perceived at once. There was much into which the Holy Spirit had to lead the infant Church after "the day in which Jesus was received up." It is indeed quite evident that there was never a message for others in the minds of the disciples, until after their Lord was parted from them and until they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. The very first preaching was the invitation to the men of "Judæa" to share in this baptism with power in the Living and

Ascended Christ, and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts ii. 38).

Thus we are brought to consider the Acts of the Apostles. It is the book of the New Testament which is not uncommonly associated with tedium, perhaps because it is so often the subject of instruction and examination in the "divinity" curricula at schools. Yet none the less it has a dramatic interest only second to that of the Gospel narratives. It tells of the expansion of the Christian Gospel from its early Judaic limitations at Jerusalem, until it swept into its embrace the whole world as symbolized by the mighty name of Rome.

There is no author in the New Testament whose reputation for authenticity and accuracy has been more remarkably vindicated than St Luke. There is no need for any hesitation in accepting the fact that both the third Gospel and the Acts came to us from his hands. At the same time it must be remembered that, as regards a great deal of the material incorporated in the Acts, St Luke was not an eye-witness but a compiler. His words of introduction to his Gospel, which refer to others having "taken in hand to draw up narratives" (Luke i. 1-4), hold good also of the Acts. He must have pieced together narratives current in the Church in Palestine telling of the earliest days at Jerusalem and of the spread of the Gospel outwards from that centre. This may well have been during the two years in which St Paul was kept by Felix in prison at Cæsarea. It is only when

we read the sixteenth chapter that we come to what has been called the "Travel Document," in which occur the "we passages" (xvi. 10-18; xx. 5-16; xxi. 1-18; xxvii. 1; xxviii. 16), where the writer speaks as the companion of St Paul.

There is no good reason for doubting that this companion of St Paul was St Luke himself. It may well be that he was also the "Man of Macedonia" (Acts xvi. 9), whose appeal to St Paul to "come over to Macedonia and help us" led to the passage of the Apostle from Asia to Europe. From the sixteenth chapter onwards, therefore, it is exceedingly probable that we have a contemporary record written by a companion of St Paul (though some would say that this is only true of the actual "we passages").

The result is a very vivid and authentic picture of the fortunes of the great Apostle, though it is remarkable how external on the whole the narrative is, and how little St Luke seems to enter into the mind and doctrine of his leader. We should know but little of the teaching of St Paul or of the burning doctrinal questions which were raised by the Churches which he founded, were we restricted to the Acts. For a full picture of St Paul and his message we must amplify the Acts by reading the Epistles. The Acts is essentially a narrative, with a dramatic theme, compiled and told by the companion of St Paul when he was well on in life. Its date must be placed at about A.D. 85.

The first part of the book (chapters i. to v.) is devoted to the picture of the early days of the Church at Jerusalem. The writer preserves with great faithfulness the Judaic character of the beginnings of Christianity. We see once more that everything turned on the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Resurrection by itself, whilst it repossessed the disciples of their faith in God, which the Cross had shattered, and showed to them that Jesus, though crucified, was nevertheless the Christ, set their minds anew towards hopes that were purely Jewish in character—"Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"—such was the question, full of national aspiration, which "when they were come together" they asked of the Risen Lord. They got no answer to their question, other than "the promise of the Father," that is, the receiving "power, when the Holy Ghost is come" upon them (i. 6-8). The full apprehension of their past experience, the unfolding of its meaning, the expansion of its scope—all that depended on the work of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that the Acts has rightly been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. Even after Pentecost the horizons of the little community, of which the governing nucleus is the Apostles (their number completed by the election of Matthias "to the ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away"), is still entirely circumscribed by the limits of Judaism.

The picture given is of the little company, at the start one hundred and twenty strong, turning in

the presence of Peter and the eleven, to share what they have received from Jesus " by the right hand of God exalted " with their fellow-Jews. The message given is that of Messianic promises fulfilled by God in Jesus His Christ. The result of this first preaching—" the adding unto them in that day of about three thousand souls "—involved no rupture with the old Jewish Church. " Day by day continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people " (ii. 46-47).

Everything is dominated by the expectation of the immediate coming again, or Presence of the Lord. It is this that lends tremendous urgency to the message of the Apostles to their fellow-Jews. A short time of respite and opportunity has been given to them, though they had crucified the Holy and Righteous One, that they might repent and turn again before " the day of the Lord come, that great and notable day." It was undoubtedly under the certain expectation of the ending of the present order of things that " all that believed were together, and had all things common ; and they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all, according as any man had need " (ii. 44, 45 ; iv. 32, 35). As the present age was about to end, the ordinary duties and requirements of life were superseded. The Lord was at hand, and they were in the last days. We shall return later to the questions raised by this first eschatological (*i.e.* to do with the last things) expectation. For the

present we note the place that it held in the community which still lies in the bosom of Judaism, and was charged with a Messianic Gospel for Jews.

Then follows the breaking of the great historic dykes within which the Apostolic company was at first hemmed in. Those happy blessed days of realized fulfilment of Jewish hope had to give way to days of stress and conflict. Indeed within the narrow circle of Judaism the Messianic Gospel called forth antagonism and rejection—" the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees were sore troubled because they taught the people and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead " (iv. 2). The rejection of Jesus by the Old Israel was recapitulated in the rejection of His witnesses. And this rejection, which had meant imprisonment and strife for the Apostles, came to a head and broke in fury upon the Church in the person of Stephen, the deacon, " a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit " (vi. 5).

He is the first great agent of the Holy Spirit who was made instrumental in leading the Church (at first little more than a sect of Judaism) out upon its Catholic mission. To him it was given to see that the salvation come from God in His Christ, meant the supersession of the traditional order of things in immemorial Zion—" We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place (the Temple) and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us " (vi. 14). It was he who rose to the revolutionary perception that the old order, though given of

God, was yet to give way to the new Word which had come from Him. In Stephen therefore we see the fermenting of the new wine which burst through the old wine-skins. And his death (to which Saul consented) marked the first breaking down of the barriers of Judaism. His blood was the veritable first seed of the Universal Church. For on the day of his martyrdom " there arose a great persecution against the Church which was in Jerusalem : and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria except the apostles " (viii. 1). Thus began to be fulfilled the last prophetic word of Jesus—" Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth " (i. 8). We are here right down upon the main dramatic theme of the whole narrative.

Philip is identified with the next stage in the great break-away from Judaism. He went down to the city of Samaria, the centre of Jewish heresy, and " proclaimed unto them the Christ " (viii. 5). He brought into the fold the first fruit of Africa in the person of the " man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and thereupon " was found at Azotus, and passing through preached the Gospel to all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea." And there in that centre of modern Hellenism he remained and planted the Church (viii. 26-40).

So we come to the intensely dramatic seizure by God of the chief and vehement leader of the persecution of the infant Church. Saul is swung

round on his tracks on the road to Damascus, and "he that in Jerusalem made havoc of them which called on the name of Jesus increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ" (ix. 21, 22).

Then follows that break in the tough fence of exclusive restrictions in regard to eating and drinking with which, by divine sanction, Judaism had been safeguarded. It was caused by the vision vouchsafed to St Peter at Joppa, followed by the falling of the Holy Ghost on Cornelius and his companions at Cæsarea (chapters x. and xi.). It is at this point that the word Gentile appears in the narrative. The Apostles and brethren that were in Judæa when they heard his defence for giving in to men uncircumcised and for eating with them, said: "Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life" (xi. 1-18).

So the fire once kindled quickly spreads. Antioch is reached by those "that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen," and though they restricted themselves to "speaking the word to none save only to Jews," the restriction could not be maintained. Soon they were speaking "unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus (xi. 19-21). Out of this sprang the predominantly Gentile Church of Antioch, which became the head-quarters of Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles and where first the followers of Jesus became publicly distinguished from Jews and were first called Christians (xi. 26).

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN

From this point onward the Acts of the Apostles are the Acts of St Paul. The church at Jerusalem with its leader St Peter wellnigh drop out of the story. The culmination of the hope of Israel in the Messianic Gospel is left behind, and is replaced by the romantic new beginnings of the preaching of a universal religion to the great Gentile world within the Roman Empire. The Gospel thus breaks right through its initial limitations and barriers. It takes the road—the great Roman roads, which first lead St Paul and St Barnabas into Asia Minor, and then St Paul with other companions out of Asia into Greece, and finally bring St Paul, though as a prisoner, to Rome.

The Acts of St Paul are one long conflict with the Judaism out of whose tenacious embrace the Gospel was torn. The scene at Antioch in Pisidia is representative. "When the Jews saw the multitudes they were jealous and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and railed. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo we turn to the Gentiles" (xiii. 45, 46).

The conflict came to a crisis when certain men "went down from Judæa and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (xv. 1). This leads to the crucial council at Jerusalem at which the leaders both of Judaic and of Gentile Christianity meet. The result is a victory for the catholicity of

the faith. Peter and James and Paul stand together in securing the one vital thing, that to be a Christian a Gentile need not first become a Jew.

Thus with unanimity secured between himself and the other Apostles, Paul fared forth again, going even farther afield into the Gentile world. Then gathered over his missionary progress the storm clouds of Judaistic hatred and antagonism which break upon him when he returned to Jerusalem to " rehearse the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry " (xxi. 19). But the civil power intervened to save him from martyrdom, and was instrumental after long delays in giving him his heart's desire—to reach the world's centre—Rome.

There the narrative ends. The last scene at Rome gathers into itself representatively the foregoing drama. St Paul makes one more effort to appeal to his own nation. But in vain. The Jews, to whom he " expounded the matter, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning till evening, they departed, not agreeing among themselves." But not before St Paul had spoken one decisive word : " Be it known unto you that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles ; they will hear " (xxviii. 28).

Thus by following the vicissitudes of the great Apostle of the Gentiles we pass, as by a bridge, from the narrow limitations within which Jesus Himself lived and from which the Gospel first

sprang, to the wide varying horizons of the catholic, that is, the universal faith. What that faith was, as it in turn grew and expanded, is to be found in the successive letters thrown off by St Paul in the course of his missionary work.

CHAPTER IX

THE EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL

The Acts contain for the most part the external account of the dramatic stages, each connected with the name of a notable individual, whereby the Gospel, at the very first hidden within the very citadel of Judaism, at Jerusalem, broke out into the great Gentile world and brought it within its universal embrace. This primal missionary adventure meant, in the nature of the case, an expansion and development of the faith. The Church came to realize the significance of its trust more and more deeply through the experience of sharing it with the world outside Judaism. In order to trace the steps in this development we have to turn to the Epistles.

Yet the very first steps are hard to trace. For if we go to the earliest Epistles—Thessalonians, Galatians, Corinthians, Romans—written by A.D. 55, we are brought at a bound to the Creed of the Church at what seems an already advanced stage of development. As we saw in an earlier chapter (see p. 207), if we seek for the implications of these Epistles, for the foundation truths which they assume, for the essential truths which the churches addressed by these Epistles held in common with

all other Christians—we find substantially the contents of the Apostles' Creed. To all alike everywhere the Gospel of God, self-revealed in His Son Jesus Christ and operative in the Holy Spirit through the Church, had been given. The Epistles nowhere set out to prove this. They assume it, they deal with the issues arising from it.

No doubt there is in these letters much that is coloured by the individuality and personal experience of their author St Paul. Yet what is far more important is that which he shared with the other Apostles and the rest of the Church. All the more is this so when we remember that he had to fight tooth and nail for the right of the Gentiles to share, though they were Gentiles, in the Gospel which was for all, "for the Jew first, but also for the Gentile." For all alike was there the great gift of God, not reached by man but arriving to man, of His Love, triumphant in His Christ though crucified, and circulating in the fellowship or communion of His Spirit. It is a mistake no doubt to assume that the full significance of this common gift and possession was apprehended or realized fully from the very start. But it is futile to endeavour to arrive at some elementary Gospel, which is earlier than the existence of the Church or is simpler or more nearly human and less theological in its attitude to Jesus Christ than say—the opening verses of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians: "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy unto the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you

and peace. We give thanks to God always for you all; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election, how that our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost (or Spirit), and in much assurance" (1 Thess. i. 1-5).

It is well to emphasize the integral place that the Church had in the original gift of God. Often the Church has been represented as arrived at as an afterthought, or as a necessary expedient when so many individual conversions had been made. Some non-ecclesiastical as well as some non-theological first stage of Christianity has been ardently sought for. It is quite indiscoverable. There is no stage in the New Testament which is earlier than the Church of God. The Church was prior to the whole fulfilment by God of His promises to and covenant with Israel. It was into the Church-Nation, the Israel of God, constituted by His choice and sending, that Jesus was born and to it He was sent. The whole of His life was lived within it. He gathered up and consummated its destiny. This meant that in a large measure it proved apostate. The Lord's Vineyard proved to be in the hands of wicked husbandmen. But it itself was not destroyed, but was let out unto other husbandmen (Matt. xxi. 41), even to those men, whom Jesus, so deliberately, chose and trained and sent. And it was these Apostles (joined

by the great brother, to whom they gave "the right hand of fellowship" as having received an identical commission) who were the authorized leaders of the New Israel (Gal. vi. 16), for the bringing to the world the salvation given to but rejected by the Old. There is not the faintest sign that any men ever made the Church, or that they only advanced to the realization that the Gospel required corporate expression. Rather the Church was there before them, and they—the Apostles—were in it and over it, and it was their part to call others into it to share in its God-given inheritance. How rich in diversified spiritual endowment that inheritance proved to be, is shown in the great chapter on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members of it. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers . . ." (1 Cor. xii. 4-6, 27-28).

Here we see the inward side, the spiritual significance, of the story of the missionary expansion of the Gospel from its earliest limitations at Jerusalem, as told in the Acts.

This process of expansion and the realization of its meaning are plainly reflected in the second group of the Epistles of St Paul written from captivity in Rome—Ephesians, Colossians, Philip-

pians. There we have—more especially in the first two—a more developed theology, and an explicit realization of the catholic range of the reconciliation by God of both Jew and Gentile in one body (Eph. ii. 16).

The mind of St Paul had been opened to enter ever more deeply into the meaning and scope of the faith as he had known it in action. So he prays that others may share in the same realization —" that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand . . . and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, and the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 17-23).

Here unmistakably is a fuller message, a deeper and more explicit understanding of the Gospel than is represented by the first preaching as reported in the Acts, whether the preaching of St Peter at Jerusalem or of St Paul on his first missionary enterprises.

A very important feature in the Gospel, which thus underwent unfolding and expansion, is the emergence of emphasis upon the *present* knowledge

of God in Christ in the fellowship of His Spirit, as contrasted by the preponderating stress laid, say, in the early Acts and in the Epistles to the Thessalonians—upon the Coming (or Parousia) of Christ and of His Kingdom in the immediate future. We may compare—" how ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come " (1 Thess. i. 9-10) : and " For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord " (1 Thess. iv. 16-17)—with " Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love " (Col. i. 12-15), and with " God being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places " (Eph. ii. 4-6). Here is the change in emphasis, which reaches its fullest expression in St John's conception of eternal life as a present possession and not only a future hope. It is only a change of emphasis. St Paul and the New Testament as a whole are dominated to the end

by the expectation of the Coming of the Lord and of the end of the age and of judgment. Indeed the eschatological (concerning the last things) elements will ever remain as essentially part of Christianity. But what comes up alongside of a waiting for the Lord from heaven and an expectation of judgment, is the realization that in Christ and in His present "Kingdom of joy and peace" there is already an enjoyment and foretaste of that which shall be hereafter.

We touch here upon a vital problem of New Testament study. There have been many students who have not hesitated to say that the whole New Testament message and indeed the authority of the Lord Himself are invalidated, on the ground that the first expectation of the end of the world and of the Parousia was disappointed.

But the problem is greatly reduced in formidableness if we remember that the followers of Jesus were never possessed of anything just by Jesus' speaking of it, but that rather His spoken word had to be translated into act before they apprehended it. So His announcement of the coming of the Kingdom was never fully understood by them, until in fact it had come in a way inconceivable to them beforehand, namely in Him Crucified and risen and present in the Spirit. The more we understand how it was only through the medium of events that they came to understand the Gospel, the plainer it will be how incapable they were of clearly seizing what the Lord said, "the last things," in days when they

could not understand beforehand what in fact did come in the Passion and Resurrection and at Pentecost. We have, therefore, also to remember how much was left by Jesus to be apprehended by His followers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He left them in possession of a Gospel of fulfilled Jewish hope. Though He had been crucified, He was nevertheless the Christ of God. This hope was accompanied in their minds at first by highly nationalist expectations of the coming of the Messianic kingdom, after a short respite to allow of repentance (see the early speeches in the Acts). But further and deeper meanings were disclosed in this Jewish, Messianic Gospel, through the lessons of missionary work, and through the clearing of their understanding of the " things of Christ " by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

There have been those who have declared that almost from the first the original and genuine Gospel, given to the world by Jesus, was corrupted, encrusted, swallowed up by pagan, Hellenistic elements, which poured into it as soon as it left Jewry and launched into the Græco-Roman world. Some of them have urged that the original Gospel had as its centre only a merely human figure, and that the whole of Christology—that is, doctrine about Christ—was derived from the mind of St Paul and from the world in which he worked.

But such views do a great violence to the evidence, with which the whole of the New

Testament resounds, that in a world full—as a jungle is full of growths—of philosophies, gnostic speculations, religious cults and mysteries and so forth, the salvation given by God through the Jew was something unique and radically different from the religions which it encountered, while at the same time it satisfied the spiritual needs and aspirations which those religions represented.

The one thing above everything else to be remembered as we study the beginnings and developments of the faith in New Testament times, and as we seek to realize how it " overcame the world," is that " salvation " was in actual fact " from the Jews." It was because of its character as the fulfilment of Jewish faith and hope that the Gospel survived and retained its identity. For as such it was never a human speculation, nor a system of ideas, but a witness to a culminating, all-fulfilling, self-revealing act of God. The Gospel was from the very start—from the start which followed upon the gathering together at the Cross of all the darkness of the mystery of God —about God. It was He who was in action. The good news was about Him. What it all meant, what it implied, had then to be apprehended. And in the process of apprehension the Church found a guide, not only in its own immediate experience, but in that which had been fulfilled in Christ, namely, Jewish faith and tradition.

Thus it saw the light thrown by the action of God Himself upon the mystery of evil, which had so perplexed Jewish monotheism. The revelation

of God in the Cross and Resurrection, while it did not explain the problem of evil, generated a faith which could confront and overcome it. The issue at stake was never that of the deification of a man. Jesus, as only another man, was but one more victim of the tragic in life. It was always the truth of God as manifested in a human life that had to be understood. And for the understanding of this manifestation there were several elements in Jewish tradition which were found to be helpful. There was the whole stream of Messianic expectation—that looking forward to the time when God would come into His own in redemptive action, when One would come from Him and establish His Kingdom.

There was Messianic terminology, including such a title as Son of God, ready to be filled with ever deeper and deeper meaning. There was also the picture of the suffering servant of the Lord ready to be understood anew, as made actual in the Crucified Jesus. So also there were the anticipations in the Wisdom literature of Judaism of the action of God through Wisdom, almost personified as His instrument and agent. This anticipation was made actual and personal in Christ, in whom the whole purpose of God in creation and in history had been summed up and fulfilled. There was also the whole tradition of sacrifice in the God-given old covenant, ready to be given new meaning by the sacrificial self-offering of Christ to the Father. There was also the Catholicism which lay deep at the prophetic

heart of Judaism. So that when the Gospel had been carried to the Gentiles, it came home to the Apostles that after all this was no more than had been anticipated by the Old Testament (see Acts xv. 15).

Thus did the Church penetrate ever more deeply into the mystery of the Gospel entrusted to it. It had no need to borrow from elsewhere. It had "in the salvation which was from the Jews" that which unfolded with ever-expanding significance.

CHAPTER X

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The course of St Paul's Epistles indicates the way in which the first Messianic Gospel, dominated by the expectation of the immediate Return of the Lord, expanded into universal range and meaning. The road to be followed leads from the early chapters of the Acts and from the Epistles to the Thessalonians, through the Epistles to the Galatians, Romans, Corinthians, to the Epistles of the Captivity, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians. There was in this process of expansion and development no departure from the original and primitive Gospel; but rather an ever deeper penetration into its meaning. The expanding range of the missionary work of the Church opened up deep upon deep in this Gospel. Thus the evangelical message develops in swelling diapason in the mind of St Paul, and passes on to further fullness in the Johannine writings.

But other voices chime in. Not only that of St Peter in his First Epistle, but that of the unknown writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here is given us, from a source independent of him, a wonderful corroboration of St Paul's catholic—full and all-embracing—message. Nothing is

certain about the authorship of the Epistle except that it is not St Paul. Scholars have debated several names. Was the author St Luke, or St Barnabas, or Apollos? No one knows. But the uncertainty affords striking evidence of how rich and full was the common understanding of the faith in the Apostolic age, and of how little it can be narrowly ascribed to any one mind.

The date of the Epistle may be fixed within narrow limits. The Epistle was clearly written under the urgent sense of impending trial and crisis. The latter almost certainly was the Jewish War with Rome which began A.D. 67. The burning of Rome and the persecution of Christians by Nero to which it led was in A.D. 64. The martyrdom of St Paul had taken place in A.D. 65. These events account for the "smell of the fire" —the sense of trials present and to come—which is redolent in the Epistle. On the other hand, there is nothing in the Epistle to indicate that the great and shaking catastrophe of the Fall of Jerusalem, in which the war with Rome culminated in A.D. 70, had taken place. Rather there is evidence in the Epistle that the temple is still standing, and that the Levitical sacrifices with which its argument had so much to do, are still in operation. (See *e.g.* viii. 4; ix. 6, 9.) So we may securely date the Epistle between A.D. 64 and 67.

The purpose of the Epistle is to rally Christian faith. It does not set forth a new faith, but it strives by a certain line of argument to rally its

readers and to help them to understand the primitive Gospel which they had received from others and from which they were in danger of backsliding.

Much study has been given to the identity of the group of Christians to whom the Epistle was directed. Were they Jewish Christians? And were they in Jerusalem, or in Egypt or in Rome? Or were they Gentile Christians? And so forth. The nature of the argument, with its main stress laid upon the fulfilment in Christ of the old Covenant or Dispensation, seems to point to the Epistle being aimed at Jewish Christians who were in danger of going back from the faith and of relapsing into Judaism. Very probably they were suffering from disappointment, owing, first, to the non-fulfilment of the expectation of the Coming of the Lord and, secondly, to the decisive rejection of the Gospel by the main body of Judaism. Very probably the threat of war with Rome had led to their being summoned to rally to the side of their threatened fellow-Jews. But in any case the Epistle is a passionate effort to bring some wavering Christians to a decisive choice and to call them to grasp more firmly the revelation of God in His Son in its fullness and finality.

As such it is, apart from its own special argument, a remarkable testimony to the primitive and original character of the Gospel of the Incarnation. We have spoken before of the need of extricating from the Epistles their main assumptions and implications. The task is especi-

ally useful in this case where the aim of the Epistle is to keep Christians true to that from which they were in danger of moving away. Nothing can be more explicit and downright than the opening verses in their declaration of the truth of the Incarnation, and in their witness to the action of God in making available that access to Himself, which is the main theme of the rest of the Epistle. " God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high " (i. 1-3).

At the same time the Epistle while testifying to the divine Sonship of Jesus, lays equal stress on the reality of His humanity. Compared with the Pauline Epistles the Epistle seems to bring us closer to the days of His flesh. It seems to be more intent on us " seeing Jesus " (ii. 9), " Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him out of death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered (v. 7-8).

But the Epistle also has its own special argument, its characteristic contribution to make to

the understanding of the faith. In part its theme is the showing of the relationship between the old dispensation and the new—the one preparatory, the other consummating. As such it is an instance of what we saw was true of the rest of the New Testament, namely that the Church penetrated further and further into the meaning of the revelation committed to it, by realizing its character as the fulfilment of what had gone before. The Hebrews is a special instance of the understanding that " salvation is of or from the Jews."

But all the more may we seize and appreciate the peculiar gift to the understanding of the Gospel which came through the writer of this Epistle. And at the same time we may rejoice in the clear-sightedness of his apprehension that the old covenant, however divinely sanctioned and important, was, by being fulfilled, superseded and remains for ever at a lower level than the new.

The peculiar gift of which we have spoken, is the setting forth of the final consummation of the destiny of man in the high-priestly self-offering of Jesus, whereby access was for ever opened unto the presence of God and unto the throne of His grace. In pursuing this theme the writer draws out the significance of the Old Testament, as preparatory to reconciliation between God and man by means of sacrifice. In so doing he brings out that which is complementary to St Paul's teaching about the Law. As a great scholar wrote : " For St Paul the Law is a code of moral ordinances ; for the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews

it is a scheme of typical provision for atonement. For the one it is a crushing burden; for the other it is a welcome if imperfect source of consolation. . . . We must indeed regard the Law under these two distinct aspects, in order that we may fully appreciate its character and its office. We must, that is, regard it on the one side as a body of commandments imposed upon man's obedience; and we must regard it on the other side as a system of ritual provided by God's mercy."

So we see that "the Hebrews" is full to the brim of the sense of "the unity, the harmonious unfolding of the divine plan." He sees with his own special vision all mounting to final fulfilment in Christ. Yet he is clear about the absolute superiority of the fulfilment over that which was preparatory to it. The word "spoken unto the fathers by the prophets" is for ever distinguished from the "word spoken in the Son" (i. 1-2). The glory of Jesus, "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession," as a son over God's house, entirely eclipses the glory of Moses who was faithful only as a servant in His house. The imperfect, powerless animal sacrifices of a succession of sinful mortal men, is entirely superseded by the perfect self-sacrifice of the eternal Son, triumphant over sin, whose priesthood is unchangeable because He abideth for ever (vii. 24). For the law, however divine in origin, was but a "shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, and can never with the same

sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh; else would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers, having been once cleansed would have had no more conscience of sins . . . but he when he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God. . . . For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (x. 1-14). Thus the first, the imperfect and the preparatory sacrifices were "taken away," to make room for the "establishing" of the second, the final and all-consummating offering of Jesus Christ. Thus in his own way the writer of the Epistle sees how the dead hand of the Law—of the old covenant—was struck off by the making of all things new by God in Christ.

No doubt the argument of the Epistle will always remain rather difficult to follow. It has its own Jewish idiom. It mounts up to Christ by a way less familiar to Gentiles than to Jews. Yet there are great passages in the Epistle, which summarize the argument in a fashion which make its meaning practical and helpful and simple for the satisfying of the deepest needs of the human heart. The Jewish tradition of sacrifice is but a supreme instance of that which rises ever again from the heart of man the whole world over, desirous as he is of access to the presence of God, and of reconciliation with Him. The Epistle to the Hebrews more than any other book in the New Testament, flings open the gates of approach to God and satisfies the human instinct of worship.

This it does by its wonderful insight into the fact that, while God alone could open the way home to Himself which was barred to sinful man, He did so by Himself entering within human nature and by partaking of human infirmity.

So the great words of invitation roll out summarizing the meaning of the whole argument. They proclaim the accessibility of God by men, sinners though they be. "Having then a great high priest who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need" (iv. 14-16). Let us "lay hold of the hope set before us; which we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast, and entering into that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us" (vi. 19-20). "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water; let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it

waver not; for he is faithful that promised" (x. 19-23).

Here is that which speaks right home to the deepest needs of the simplest soul. The words furnish him with guidance towards finding peace and reconciliation with God. They make the Epistle very precious for satisfying the needs of personal religion. But another great passage brings out that the way by which individuals can come one by one and find access to God, is a way which brings them into the society of others who have preceded them, and into communion with the society of heaven. The approach to God is therefore more than individual, it is also social—"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (xii. 1, 2). . . . For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words . . . but ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than

that of Abel" (xii. 18-24). . . . "Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come. Through him then let us offer up sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of lips which make confession to his name" (xiii. 13-15).

So it is that the Epistle, however hard some of its contents may be in detail, has a message which anyone can understand. It has traced the way in which, as a member of the worshipping Church, the "wayfaring man, though fool, shall not err."

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST PETER

So far as the early and universal tradition of the Church goes, there is no book in the New Testament of which the credentials are stronger than this Epistle. If we are satisfied by the voice of tradition we shall accept the Epistle without more ado as coming from the great Christian leader, the Apostle Peter. Yet perhaps in part because of the challenge of early tradition, modern scholarship has raised many questions as to the authenticity and authorship of this Epistle. For instance, it has been doubted whether the Galilean disciple, whose "speech bewrayed" him in the court of the High Priest (Matt. xxvi. 73), and whom the rulers at Jerusalem perceived to be an "unlearned and ignorant" man (Acts iv. 13), could have attained to that mastery of the Greek language which is disclosed by the Epistle. Again, it has been suggested that a comparison of the Epistle with those of St Paul, more especially with the Epistles to the Romans and to the Ephesians, shows not a few points of resemblance between them. Hence the attribution of the Epistle if not to St Paul, at any rate to his influence.

Further, the commonly accepted view that

St Peter wrote the Epistle from Rome ("the church that is in Babylon . . . saluteth you," 1 Pet. v. 13), about the time of that outbreak of the Neronian Persecution in A.D. 64, has been challenged on the ground that there is complete silence in the Epistle about St Paul, both about his presence and captivity in Rome or about his martyrdom there. And so forth.

Here is an instance where the simplicity of "tradition" has been replaced by the complexity of "criticism."

It is fair to remark that, in a case such as this, where there is no external evidence in the possession of scholars such as the ordinary Christian is without, the value and authenticity of the document must in a great measure be judged by the weight of its internal evidence, that is by the appeal and force of its contents. It is also legitimate to surmise that the Apostles called to the Lord as young men, charged by Him with their tremendous task of spreading the Gospel, and endowed with the rich gifts of the Holy Spirit of God, may well have grown and advanced in linguistic capacity, so that, as they set themselves resolutely to their mission, they were able to obtain a mastery of the Greek language as spoken and written in their day. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that in this case the Greek represented by the Epistle betrays intimate familiarity with the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint).

As regards the relationship of the Epistle to

those of St Paul, it is noticeable that scholars also find similarities between it and other New Testament writings, which no one would ascribe to St Paul, notably the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of St James. This leads fairly to the supposition that, as against the tendency, which has been common among scholars, to attribute as much as possible of the New Testament to St Paul, there was a common mind of the Church in the Apostolic age in which St Paul and the other Christian leaders shared. It is known that the great controversy about the admission of the Gentiles into the Church produced a tension between St Peter and St Paul as respectively Apostles of the Circumcision and of the Gentiles (Gal. ii. 8). But it is also equally sure that the two great protagonists gave to each other the "right hand of fellowship" in the consciousness that they were sharers of a common gospel. The presence, too, of subordinate men, who were intimate comrades of the leaders of the Church, such as Mark and Silvanus (or Silas), strengthens the belief that there was a main gospel shared by all and not to be attributed to any one man. We have seen before how very central a place St Mark held in the whole Apostolic scene. He is mentioned at the end of this Epistle, "Mark, my son, saluteth you" (1 Pet. v. 13). And if, as is generally thought, Silvanus is the Silas, who, as one of the "chief men among the brethren" and being "himself a prophet," was chosen to commend the decision of the council at Jerusalem on the critical

question of the circumcision and was a companion of St Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts xv. 22); then the fact that the writer of the Epistle says of him—"By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him, I have written unto you briefly exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God" (1 Pet. v. 12), strengthens the belief in the existence of a common or main Gospel, which is more than Pauline or Petrine or than is derivable from any one source.

On the whole problem of this epistle a great and cautious scholar, after carefully reviewing and examining a great number of theories, comes to the following provisional conclusion: "To sum up: all the conditions of the problem seem to be satisfied if we assign the Epistle to a time shortly after St Paul's trial (at Rome) had ended in his acquittal. The power of the Roman State seemed to be on the side of the Church. But the nation of the Jews was an enemy 'scotched not killed,' nay, perhaps it was intensified because deprived of its expected prey. Nor would the social trials among their heathen neighbours be lessened by the Imperial decision. The daily experience of a Christian at Rome might well suggest serious warnings as to the proving of faith through suffering. The situation was as follows: St Paul had himself summoned St Peter to Rome with the supreme object of showing to the Christians at Rome and to 'the brotherhood in the world' the unity of the Body and of the Spirit. St Peter had arrived at Rome, and with him St Paul's

old companion Silvanus. After St Paul's release Silvanus consents to undertake a long journey in Asia Minor. Silvanus would explain to these churches the situation at Rome. He would enforce the spiritual and doctrinal lessons which were uppermost in St Paul's mind. But the work of consolidating the churches, and in them the Church, would be greatly advanced if Silvanus, the messenger of St Paul, brought with him a letter from St Peter. The letter itself might deal with general topics, as indeed was inevitable when it was addressed to readers spread over so vast an area. But the fact that it was written by St Peter, now a fellow-worker with St Paul at Rome, and transmitted by the common friend of both Apostles, now executing St Paul's commission, was itself the revelation of the mind of the Apostles, and a call to deepen the common life of the brotherhood (cf. ii. 17 : 'Love the brotherhood'), the significance of which cannot be exaggerated." [1]

Some, no doubt, will think this reconstruction of the circumstances under which the Epistle was written to be too good to be true, but it is worthy to be quoted as coming from a scholar whose care in weighing up all the aspects of the problems involved is indisputable.

After this introduction we may proceed to form an estimate of the contents of the Epistle—its internal evidence—on the supposition that it was written by St Peter (perhaps with the lin-

[1] Bishop Chase, Article in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible.*

guistic help of Silvanus), and that he shared in the Gospel common to " the brotherhood," was intimate with the teaching of St Paul and yet had his own message for others. In the main the Epistle is one of simple, practical encouragement to Christians under trial. They have been " put to grief in manifold trials," that their faith might be proved as gold is proved by fire (i. 6, 7). It is unlikely that these trials arose from persecution by Roman officials, for the writer implies that " the government " is still to be respected and honoured and obeyed. This suggests that the persecution under the Emperor Nero in A.D. 64 had not yet broken out. There was abundance of trial for early Christians, whether from the surrounding heathen affronted by their " good manner of life in Christ " (iii. 16), or from the antagonism of unconverted Jews. At any rate the Christians addressed in this letter are bidden—much as St Paul bade those to whom he wrote in the Epistle to the Romans—to " be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king as supreme ; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that by well doing we should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. . . . Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king " (ii. 13-17).

In writing to encourage fellow-Christians under trial, nothing can be stronger than the writer's testimony to the sovereignty of God indicated in

and through suffering. Taken by itself, and apart from questions about authorship, etc., the letter is a wonderful instance of the main thing in the New Testament—its deep vibrating assurance about God. But that assurance acquires a yet higher and more significant character if we think—as we have already done—of the collapse and breakdown of St Peter at the Passion of his Lord, of his inability—from Cæsarea Philippi onwards—to reconcile that Passion with his conception of God and of His Kingdom. The experience, then, of a Jew's fundamental Jewish faith in God being broken and then remade, lies behind the Epistle. At its very start, after the opening salutation, an ascription of praise breaks out, which is instinct with the testimony of the followers of Jesus to the fact that the hour of the collapse of human hope was, nevertheless, God's hour. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled" (i. 3, 4).

So again the experience of a man, to whom the Cross had been a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" (ii. 8), lies behind these words, so eloquent of that which is the essence and the point of the Gospel—"And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear: knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from

your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ, who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times for your sake, *who through him are believers in God, which raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God*" (i. 17-21). Here is the Jewish root of Christianty laid bare—its inmost core of faith in the sovereignty of God, but it is that faith restored and refounded, once shaken to its fall but now for ever unshakable.

The words of strong encouragement to fellow-Christians, suffering and threatened by suffering, receive an added power when we read them as coming from a witness of the sufferings of Christ (v. 1), to whom these sufferings had been but the spelling out of unintelligible disaster. But having been born again unto a living hope, the man who could not follow his Master at the time, knows that he and others can follow "afterwards,"—that the way of suffering is the way of victorious discipleship and service. Behind these words lies the dark scene in the court of the high priest branded in tragedy upon the faithless soul of Peter, yet that same scene transfigured and filled with bright meaning. "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow in his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he was reviled, reviled not

again, when he suffered threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed" (ii. 21-24). So the man who had taken aside the Christ to rebuke Him, when He opened to him the prospect of fulfilment of the Father's will through suffering, can write "For it is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing. Because Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God . . . insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice" (iii. 17, 18; iv. 13). Behind the words (can it be doubted?) lies the experience of seeing a road tragically barred, but a road nevertheless wonderfully cleared and made a highway to walk in.

This is the main significance of the Epistle. As such it is a great piece of evidence to the fact that Christianity is rooted in the Old Testament. The writer has found a way for "sojourners and pilgrims" (ii. 11) under heavy trial to walk in. It is a way which leads forward to new things because it leads back to and illuminates old. The salvation which had come is that "which prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point out, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and

the glories that should follow them" (i. 10, 11). Here is the Old Testament, which by itself had not enabled St Peter and the others to anticipate or understand the sufferings of the Christ, transformed by its fulfilment by the New Covenant.

So again all the old essentially Jewish and exclusive language is applicable to those who have received the Gospel, which is the fulfilment of the Old Covenant. The inheritance of the Church is continuous with the old Israel of God. "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (ii. 9-10).

It is a Jew become Christian who writes, a fellow-Jew with St Paul, but a simpler soul less subtle and analytical. Here are no oppositions between faith and work, spirit and letter, law and freedom; no delicate distinctions between flesh and soul and spirit. But here also are not the depths of the great Apostle to the Gentiles' experience. Christ is indeed the beloved Lord to be followed and loved—"Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (i. 8). But in this little Epistle there is, by comparison with St Paul's, little testimony to the inner transformation of

the soul by Christ present in the Spirit. There is far less evidence of mystical union with Him. Yet, if one star differeth from another star in glory, both shine. Both Apostles shine as great stars. And the light of this Epistle, reflected by the transfigured soul of a witness of the sufferings of Christ, is glorious.

CHAPTER XII

THE FOURTH GOSPEL[1]

THE Fourth Gospel is the "stricken field" where the battle among students of the Bible has raged most fiercely. On no other book in the Bible is it so difficult to write shortly and simply, without falling under the censure of "the judicious Hooker" for writing what is "more simple than true."

The Fourth Gospel of all the books of the New Testament has raised the issue, to which the historically-minded are specially sensitive, whether theology, the influences of Greek thought, Church interests, etc., have entered to diminish or dilute the authenticity and reliability of "Gospel" truth.

Yet it is well not to approach this great and precious book from the very start merely as an object of suspicion. Rather it is right to approach it with the sense of its wealth in all that has nourished the soul of Christ-loving Christianity. This sense will be all the stronger if it is assumed,

[1] Anyone who has read Henry Scott Holland's *The Fourth Gospel* will recognize at once to whom I am indebted for this and the following chapters. Indeed I take this opportunity of recording how much this *Thoroughfare* owes to that, as I think, uniquely gifted interpreter of the Bible.

as assuredly it may be, that the Gospel comes to us from the same source as the first Epistle of St John.

If then it be asked "How is the Fourth Gospel to be read?" the answer in the first place is "Read the first Epistle of St John first." There indeed is to be found, in deepest concentration, the witness of the Apostolic age to the experienced reality of God, as revealed in Christ and operative in the Spirit. Verse after verse gives, in perfect summary, the testimony of a man who *knows* the light, the love, the power of Christ. To him there has arrived that which is the spring of all hope and confidence, namely the love of God given to man, in action towards man, anticipating and prior to anything whatever from man's side. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. . . . We love because he first loved us" (1 John iv. 10, 19). In that love of God he has lived, finding there a fountain of cleansing (i. 7), a deliverance from fear (iv. 18), a secret of love of the brethren (iii. 14), a knowledge of life already eternal (v. 20). He knows that in himself as in others "hath the love of God been perfected."

And that which has so possessed him (and others) has been really manifested. This "knowledge" of God, this abiding in Him, is entirely bound up with the reality of the revelation of God in His Son. The inward experience is the verification of the external action upon the field of history taken by God Himself. That is the

quintessence of the writer's witness maintained in the face of insidious Gnostic propaganda which, out of a dualistic contempt for things material and bodily, denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. Here is the Antichrist to be overcome. The Docetic heresy, that is, the speculation that the taking of our human nature by Jesus Christ was only apparent—was already in the field. It threatened to reduce the Gospel to a mystical "knowledge" of God, divorced from conduct, indifferent to sins of the flesh, and negligent of love of the brethren. This enemy the writer opposes by the most urgent imaginable testimony to the reality of the manifestation of the Father in the Son. The Epistle keeps recurring to the actuality of the action taken by God, as against the notion that salvation could be found merely in ideas, or in mysticism or allegory.

The writer's passionate desire is to give his personal testimony to the actual historical happening, the deed done, the divine event. "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled concerning the word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these

things we write, that our (or your) joy may be fulfilled" (i. 1-4).

Was ever any testimony more emphatic?

It is recurrent. "Hereby know we love because he laid down his life for us" (*i.e.* he acted the love out, iii. 16). "This is he who came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with (or in) the water and with (or in) the blood" (v. 6). "We have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (iv. 14). Such is the witness to historic reality as the essential basis for everything else. This it is which demands a corresponding reality on the part of those who acknowledge the divine revelation, in sorrow for sin, in love of brethren, in keeping the commandments. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment" (iii. 23).

The Epistle then gives the background against which the Fourth Gospel must be set. It was to enforce the witness which beats through the Epistle that the Gospel was written—"that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name (John xx. 31).

So the questions arise—Whose witness? Who is the author who so writes? What is his authority? Perhaps some will say: Does it really matter who wrote the Gospel? Is it not enough to take it as it is? Why say more than that it is

representative of early Church witness and experience, whilst the question of authorship is left open?

There is enough truth in this contention to satisfy the souls of some. Yet the Gospel itself makes such satisfaction precarious, for its contents, as we shall see, keep raising and pressing the question of authorship. The question is too urgent to be laid aside or ignored. If so, then it is well to remind ourselves that however urgent and indeed crucial this or that question of authorship may be, the truth of Christianity does not stand or fall with it. For the essence of Christianity does not lie in any reported word of Jesus but in a deed done. He came not to save men by ideas or by teaching, but to act. And a testimony to the action acted out, to the deed done, underlies the whole of the New Testament. It is of a massiveness which is unshaken by uncertainty surrounding this or that literary problem. Indeed the very existence and continuance and expansion of the Church itself are part of the testimony. They witness to the action of God in Christ.

Yet, when all is said, this particular question of authorship presses upon the mind and begs to be answered. The Fourth Gospel raises the issue about which the thought of our time at its best really cares, namely the question of historicity and authenticity. Granted that here is witness to the manifestation of the Father in the Son—then whose? Is it authentic and trustworthy? Is it first-hand?

There is no doubt that a genuine concern for historical reality has led the vast majority of Biblical scholars to do two things: (*a*) to be suspicious of the Johannine record; (*b*) to find the core of real history rather in the Synoptic records. There is a manifest contrast between the Fourth Gospel and the first three Gospels. And the contrast seems to favour the latter. An historical sense, and an instinct of realism find, say, in St Mark, a more genuine story than in "St John." The historical drama in the former has an actuality about it which is not in the latter. A certain timelessness seems to characterize the Johannine story in contrast with the real dramatic movement of the Marcan. And the central figure of the drama, Jesus of Nazareth—He stands out with clearer outline, with more self-authentication, in the one than in the other. He and His teaching are, so to say, more racy, more characteristic in the bare Marcan story than when mediated by the more theological Gospel. In the latter Jesus seems to be veiled in a measure by divine attributes. As Jesus of Nazareth He is nearer, more real to us than as the Word made flesh.

There is truth here which it would be futile to deny. Yet the contrast between the Synoptic and Johannine records—between portrayal of our Lord in either—is easy to exaggerate. It has been much exaggerated, more especially by those who have desired to rest satisfied with a merely human Jesus and to be rid of all doctrine or theology about Him.

Two things have got to be borne in mind in judging of the contrast: (1) the bare Synoptic story taken in abstraction and by itself does not explain itself; (2) the Fourth Gospel is far from being merely theological in character. It is full of history.

As regards (1) we need do little more than refer to what has been said before. The Synoptic records only explain themselves to those who read them in the light of the Gospel of God in Christ. By themselves they do not contain the Gospel. For they tell of what happened in the days before the Gospel—the good news of God—had arrived, before Christianity was born. The arrival, the birth, only began with the Resurrection. The Synoptic story only leads up to that. By itself it does not say who it is who went to his death at Calvary, nor what was the meaning—the glorious meaning—of the death. Yet the truth, the meaning, are there, they are implicit in the minds of those who wrote and those who accepted the Synoptic records. The good news is the common assumption of writers and readers. The introduction of St Luke's Gospel (i. 1-4), makes that quite plain. And the truth, implied, assumed, and shared, gives meaning and coherence to the story. Without it the story raises a series of unanswered questions. Without it the bare tale falls into incoherence.

On the other hand, the Fourth Gospel brings out and makes fully explicit that which the first

three Gospels imply. It states at its outset what the Gospel is, and who it is who is its central figure, and what the results in the experience of others which flow from it and from Him. It sums up the truth of the Incarnation in the statement that the "Word was made flesh": it tells of those who by receiving Him who became incarnate had become children of God: it avows the desire to foster that belief in Him which means life in His name.

No doubt there is a more developed theology explicit in the Johannine writings than is implicit in the Synoptic. But not greatly so. For behind and implied in the latter is, as we have seen, the Gospel underlying, the truth of God implied by, the earlier Epistles.

And that there is not a great difference as regards fundamental truth, explicit on the one hand and implied on the other, is almost sensationally witnessed to by the famous passage in the Synoptic Gospels—and in their earliest strata—where they seem to break out with Johannine utterance, where the underlying truth of the unique Sonship of Jesus comes to the surface and declares itself. The practically identical passage occurs both in St Matthew (xi. 25 ff.), and in St Luke (x. 21 ff.). "At that season Jesus answered and said: I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. All things have been

delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FOURTH GOSPEL—*continued*

(2) On the other hand, if the contrast between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel has been heightened by leaving out of account the Gospel of God in His Son implicit in the former, it has also been heightened by those who have seen only theologizing, idealizing, allegorizing in the latter. No doubt the theological interest is to the fore in the Fourth Gospel. The figure of our Lord is there viewed doctrinally, as already during the ministry manifesting His divine Sonship and as laying claim to it. Yet what also has to be taken into account is the writer's determination, in the face of speculative theorizing which attacked the Incarnation as a thing of fact, to go back to the facts, to the historical circumstances and occasions under which the Word became flesh—"to what really was acted out on the plane of material existence in this world of fact."[1] The more the character of the attack upon the faith is understood, the more difficult is it to suppose that the Evangelist met allegory by allegory; the more impressive becomes the evidence that he is a witness to historical event. "The Word became

[1] Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p. 389.

flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory" —that is the note of witness to actual event which he strikes at the outset.

The famous Prologue then is not to be read simply for its theological meaning. For as soon as the writer has summarized the significance of the whole revelation—using the terminology which, while it lay to his hand in Old Testament tradition, was calculated to be specially intelligible to the Greek mind—he turns at once to the drama of the acceptance and of the rejection of Him, in whom the glory of God had been revealed. The second answer therefore to the question—How to read the Gospel? is: "Read it with a view to following the development, on the one hand, of faith in Jesus Christ in those who received Him; and, on the other hand, of disbelief in Him in those who rejected Him." For the writer sees that the coming of the Lord was as a light shining in darkness which operated as a judgment upon the people among whom He came, that is, as an event which laid bare their spiritual condition prior to its arrival, according to which some were drawn to the light, while others refused to come. As the writer says in a passage, which is clearly that of his own commentary: "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him" (iii. 17). Yet in fact the sending of the Son did bring judgment, separation, division, to those among whom He came, and it goes on doing so in succeeding generations.

Back, then, the Evangelist takes his readers to the historic beginning of faith in Jesus. That is the explanation of the abrupt turn in the Prologue from the high language telling of the Word that "was in the beginning and was with God and was God," to the historic figure of the Baptist. "There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him" (i. 6, 7). This is the beginning which all the four Gospels have in common. It is the ministry of the great prophetic man, which was so momentous that it was even thought that he was the Christ—the man who was nevertheless, as he himself "confessed and denied not," not the Christ, but only "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord" (i. 19-28). But the Fourth Gospel points to the particular importance of the Baptist and his ministry. For the hour at which two disciples of the Baptist passed over from him to follow Jesus was the historic hour of the very beginnings of Christian faith. So the writer records, with minute notes of time and with intimate and personal touches, how first Andrew and a nameless one, and then Peter, and then Philip, and then Nathanael, entered upon the experience of following Jesus.

It is from this historic, vividly remembered, indeed unforgettable, beginning that the drama of acceptance and rejection moves forward. The chief motive in the mind of the writer, namely, of

tracing the growth of belief and disbelief, will be made plain by illustrations.

(1) First, then, the growth of the disbelieving, rejecting spirit or attitude. The pitiful tragedy of it is emphasized in the Prologue—that, though the Christ "came unto his own, they that were his own received him not" (i. 11). The first note of discord shows itself at the cleansing of the Temple. "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" This is followed by the comment of the writer: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did." But such belief was inadequate, and so the writer adds: "But Jesus did not trust himself unto them" (ii. 18 ff.). The same insufficiency of belief reappears at Capernaum: "Jesus therefore said unto him (the nobleman), Except ye see signs and wonders ye will in nowise believe" (iv. 48).

The opposition to Jesus at Jerusalem develops to the point of persecution. This appears after the healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda: "For this cause did the Jews persecute Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath" (v. 16). The root of the hostility is laid bare at the end of the chapter: "How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not"? (v. 44). On the other hand, the enthusiasm of the people in Galilee and their national hopes are

dashed by the refusal of Jesus to allow Himself to be made King (vi. 15). This is followed by the withdrawal of "many of his disciples" after the "hard sayings" about the "bread of life." "Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" "Upon this many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him" (vi. 66). And it was from this crisis onwards that there was in Judas Iscariot that which issued in the end in his betraying Jesus (vi. 70-71). Even within the circle of His own folk there was disbelief. "For even his brethren did not believe on him" (vii. 5).

At the Feast of the Tabernacles the surmises, questions and objections of this section and that are vividly reported. "There was much murmuring among the multitudes concerning him: some said, He is a good man; others said, Not so, but he leadeth the multitude astray . . . the Jews therefore marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" . . . "Some therefore of them of Jerusalem said, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? And lo, he speaketh openly, and they say nothing unto him. Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?" . . . "But of the multitude many believed on him: and they said, When the Christ shall come, will he do more signs than those which this man hath done?" . . . "Some of the multitude therefore, when they heard these words, said, This is of a truth the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, What, doth the

Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So there arose a division in the multitude concerning him." The officers sent to take Him are impressed by Him, but the Pharisees rejoin: "Are ye also led astray? Hath any of the rulers believed on him or of the Pharisees?" And (to Nicodemus): "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (vii. 12, 15, 25, 26, 31, 40-43, 48, 52).

In no other chapter are the interest and motive of the writer more evident. Belief and disbelief are in process of development. We may note incidentally how very probable it is that the writer was fully aware of the birth at Bethlehem, and therefore felt and expressed the irony of so much controversy unconsciously turning on the point.

Antagonism to Jesus deepens painfully in the next chapter. "The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true." . . . "They answered unto him, We be Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" . . . "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? . . . They took up stones therefore to cast at him" (viii. 13, 33, 48, 59). The healing of the man born blind discloses invincible prejudice in the opponents. The incident has acted as a judgment (a testing) of them. It has resulted in their being convicted of

sin. "Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say, We see: your sin remaineth" (ix. 41).

The division or separation at work reappears in the next chapter. "There arose a division among the Jews because of these words (about the Shepherd and the sheep). And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the sayings of one possessed with a devil? Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" (x. 19-21).

So the drama of rejection mounts to a head. The raising of Lazarus precipitates it. "Many therefore of the Jews which came to Mary and beheld that which he did, believed on him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done. The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? For this man doeth many signs. So from that day forth they took counsel to put him to death" (xi. 45, 48-53). So much for the development of the spirit of rejection.

(2) The growth of belief runs parallel to the growth of disbelief. Cana marks an early moment in it. "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed on him" (ii. 11). At the cleansing of the Temple they were as puzzled as the rest at the saying, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Only subsequently

did they understand and " believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said " (ii. 22). So the writer remembers.

The coming of Nicodemus to Jesus by night illustrates the insufficiency of an attitude to Him as " a teacher come from God " (iii. 2). But such an attitude had in it the seed of fuller belief. The conversation with the woman of Samaria mounts to the declaration of belief by many of the Samaritans. " And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman who testified, He told me all things that I ever did. So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them ; and he abode there two days. And many more believed on him because of his word ; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking ; for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world " (iv. 39-42).

Similarly the nobleman at Capernaum was an instance of belief : " So the father knew it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth : and himself believed and his whole house " (iv. 53).

The feeding of the five thousand was an occasion of the testing of the followers, notably of Philip. " Jesus . . . saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat ? And this he said to prove him " (vi. 5-6).

The crisis at which many " disciples went back " meant the closer attachment to their Master on

the part of the few that remained. "Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (vi. 67, 68).

In chapter viii. there is a note of comment: "As he spake these things, many believed on him" (viii. 30). The teaching about the shepherd and the sheep was obscure to the followers. "This parable spake Jesus unto them; but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them" (x. 6).

The going of Jesus beyond Jordan to one of the old haunts of the Baptist, the former master of the disciples, was the remembered occasion of belief and reassurance. "Many came unto him (there); and they said, John indeed did no sign; but all things whatsoever John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there" (x. 40-42). We have already noted the impression made by the raising of Lazarus.

When the tragedy comes to consummation the disciples accompany their Master as far as they were capable. But they could not follow all the way. "Jesus answered (Peter), Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards" (xiii. 36). They "believe in God," but their belief in Jesus is not fully formed. Thomas, first, and then Philip, express their perplexity. "Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way? . . . Philip saith unto him: Lord, shew us

the Father and it sufficeth us" (xiv. 1, 5, 8). At one supreme moment all seemed to come clear to them: "His disciples say, Lo, now speakest thou plainly and speakest no proverb. Now know we that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God" (xvi. 29-30). But this belief was inadequate to the event. "Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (xvi. 32).

The startling incident of the piercing of the crucified Master's side contributed to the making of belief in the man who witnessed it. He desired to share it with others. "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe" (xix. 35). A decisive moment of belief came to "the other disciple" who ran to the tomb with Peter. Peter entered first, though he arrived last. "Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, which came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed" (xx. 8).

Thomas proves hard to convince. But the main body of the book ends when the growth of faith—faith so long in formation, so long inadequate, so overwhelmed by the tragedy of the Crucifixion—comes to fruition in him, in his great cry: "My Lord and my God." "Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed:

blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (xx. 28, 29). And thus the writer can close his record: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (xx. 30, 31).

No one I think can deny that this way of traversing the Gospel by tracing the double growth of belief and disbelief raises, during its course, many difficulties. Such are the position of the cleansing of the Temple at the outset of the ministry; the apparent inconsistency about the place and significance of signs; the bitterness of tone in the controversies with "the Jews"; the awfulness of the verdict that God had "blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart"; the crucial importance in the drama of the raising of Lazarus—an incident about which the other Gospels are silent; and indeed many other difficulties that have to do with the character of what our Lord claimed for Himself.

But one thing is, I think, overwhelmingly true, that this way of reading the book discloses the motive and the mind of its writer, and that his concern is to recall how in actual fact and historically the drama worked itself out.

There is much to be added in confirmation of this intention of the Evangelist. As he tells his story he brings to life again the old local Jewish

circumstances amid which the ministry of our Lord was laid. The little local rivalries—between Galilee and Jerusalem, between the Jews and the Samaritans—appear interwoven with the story. The old world of Messianic suppositions and expectations lives again. And this is the more remarkable, and the more confirms the historical character of the Gospel, when it is remembered that these details would have little interest for the Greeks for whom the Gospel was written, and belonged to an order of things which, after the fall of Jerusalem, had perished from the earth. The story again abounds in little features of remembered fact which have no symbolic or mystical significance, but which appear because they are in the memory of the writer and find their way into the story just because that is how things did actually happen, *e.g.* "the woman left her waterpot and went away into the city" (iv. 28). "It was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem; it was winter; Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's porch" (x. 22).

We have also to notice that while there are passages which imply greater and fuller claims on the part of our Lord, the main thing at issue in the Gospel is His Messiahship. "The Jews therefore came round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly" (x. 24). And the rejection of Jesus is not just the rejection of Himself, but the rejection of the unseen Father in whose name He had come. The Gospel in this

way only brings out with explicitness that which underlies the drama of the ministry in the Synoptic Gospels, namely that what led to the rejection, sprang from the wrong conception of God—the wrong attitude to Him—which were there in the souls of the fellow-countrymen antecedently to the coming of Jesus, and were brought to light and put into action by His coming. "I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (v. 43). . . . "He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God" (viii. 47). If this is true, then the Fourth Gospel is on all fours with the other three in the fundamental fact that the truth of the Person of our Lord was never fully known during the ministry, but lay hidden; and that only in the light of the vindicated Fatherhood —only in the light of the Resurrection—was His Sonship fully revealed. It was only known "afterwards." "Thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards" (xiii. 36).

Finally the Fourth Gospel throws light on an acute problem which arises from the ministry as told by the other three Gospels. And that is the position of Jerusalem. The Synoptic Gospels never explain how it was that our Lord "withdrew" into Galilee; how His ministry there was one characterized by further withdrawal from the multitude and from publicity; how Jerusalem appears in the story only as the place which, having had its chance of accepting Him, is inevitably the

scene of His suffering. How and when Jerusalem had passed under condemnation as blind to the day of its visitation is never explained. Yet when finally and in due time our Lord does set His face to go to Jerusalem and arrives there, it appears that He has friends and allies there, *e.g.* the man with whom an arrangement has been made about the provision of the upper room. No explanation is given of the existence of these people. Once more we see how little the Synoptic story by itself explains itself.

But the Fourth Gospel, written on the top of the Synoptic story, and on the assumption that the story is known, but masterfully amplifying and correcting it, throws light on this problem. It discloses a ministry at Jerusalem, and the development of an attitude of rejection there in the light of which—under menace from which—our Lord withdrew into Galilee. "For Jesus himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country"—His own country being Judæa. "His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may behold thy works which thou doest" (iv. 44; cf. vii. 3).

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY HAWARDEN

CHAPTER XIV

THE FOURTH GOSPEL—*continued*

We come round, then, to the question of authorship. Any and every examination of this book of witness to the revelation of God in Christ drives the question of authorship to the fore—*Whose* witness? For the book is full of the personality of the author, his personal witness. Here, if ever, the personal equation is prominent. Whence come these intimate, inner-ring memories? Who is it that stands over the Synoptic story, adding to it, correcting it so masterfully? Who is it that has so entered into the mind of the Master that he can reproduce His amazing last discourses? Who is this great spiritual master in whose soul the Gospel has brought forth so lovely and full a fruit as the First Epistle?

I confess that I find it almost impossible to attend to the supposition which seems to be frequently favoured in the world of scholarship. It is that the Apostle John was martyred before the Fall of Jerusalem; that later on at Ephesus another John, the Elder, who possibly as a boy was acquainted with our Lord, wrote the Fourth Gospel; that quickly a confusion arose about the two Johns, and the Church took the one for the

other. I will not trouble my readers with a further discussion of this supposition. It would be profitless to do so. The weight of that for which it professes to account seems to me completely to break it down. For the evidence is massively overwhelming that the Gospel comes to us on the authority of no less than one of the inner circle of Apostolic men.

The conclusion upon which the internal evidence converges is that the Gospel is the record of the witness of the nameless disciple of the Baptist, who, on a certain memorable day and at a certain hour, passed over from the Baptist to the One greater than he: who was within the inner ring of disciples and knew their personal and individual characteristics: who remembered what they felt and said, and not only so, but what they felt at the time and did not say:[1] who could distinguish between their partial understanding at the time and its subsequent illumination:[2] who, on the tremendous last evening, "leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, saith unto him, Lord, who

[1] *E.g.* xiii. 28: "Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or that he should give some to the poor," and xxi. 12: "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord."

[2] *E.g.* ii. 22: "When therefore he was risen from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them," and xii. 16: "These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him." "These things" have to do with the royal entry into Jerusalem.

is it ? " (xiii. 25) : " who was known unto the high priest, and entered in with Jesus into the court of the high priest " (xviii. 15) : who saw the side of the Crucified pierced and bore witness to what he saw (xix. 35) : who ran to the tomb with Simon Peter, and " outran him and came first to the tomb ; and stooping and looking in " saw " the linen cloths lying ; yet entered not in " (xx. 5) : about whom the " saying went forth among the brethren that that disciple should not die " (xxi. 23) : whose imminent death therefore raised the question : Did the Master say that he should not die, or only " If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? " (Peter) : who is the disciple whom Jesus loved.

And the one figure upon whom this converging evidence centres is the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. He truly seems to be the only competitor. If it is not he, then, indeed, we do not know who the author is. No one else meets that which is demanded by the problem. No other cause is commensurate with the effect.

There will always remain a great deal of difficulty and obscurity about this and that in the Fourth Gospel, but it will be difficulty which will be tolerable if the Gospel has behind it the authority of St John. It will be tolerable just because the personal equation in the whole matter is so great, and because we know whose is the personal equation. The difference between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels, though it will never be free from difficulty, will be bear-

able. For it will be partly intelligible. After all, the other three Gospels were not written by eye-witnesses, but by lesser men who report the report of eye-witnesses. St Luke makes that abundantly evident. His was the part to " draw up a narrative concerning those things which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word " (Luke i. 1-2). But he makes no pretension to have been himself one of the " authorities," one of the eye-witnesses. Supposing then that one of the great men, who himself saw (and in part understood), came forward to bear witness ; supposing, too, that that which he had seen (and in part understood) had been fused in his heart and life with a lifetime's experience, illumination, reflection, and leadership—it would be strange if his Gospel were not different from the other three. It would be strange if there were not more of the deep inwardness of *the Gospel* in his Gospel compared with the other more external narratives.

All this bears directly upon the main and ever-remaining problem of the Fourth Gospel, which is to identify the actual words of Jesus, and to distinguish them from commentary and reflection on them.

There is no doubt at all that fused with the memory and witness of the Apostle are not only his own meditations and the fruits of his own experience, but also the lessons of Church life and practice which he shared with others. The

Gospel as it stands illustrates the fulfilment of the promise that things not understood at the time, and things which at the time they could not bear, should afterwards be illuminated and put into their possession by the Holy Spirit. ("I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth . . . he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine and declare it unto you," xvi. 12-14.)

This means a permanent difficulty in discriminating original words of Jesus from subsequent reflection on them; what was said by Him at the time from what the writer is saying later to his fellow-Christians. In some places the passage from the original incident and from what was said then to the subsequent commentary seems plainly marked. For instance, the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus in chapter iii. passes over definitely at verse 16 to the writer's commentary. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Similarly the original witness of John the Baptist, ending with "He must increase but I must decrease," is followed by the writer's commentary: "He that cometh from above is above all; what is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh; he that cometh from heaven is above all. What he hath seen and heard, of that he beareth witness; and no man receiveth his witness. He that hath received his

witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true" (iii. 30-33).

Here is surely the testimony of experience, telling not only of promises being made but of promises fulfilled. This note of testimony seems to sound clearly where our Lord is referred to in the third person (*e.g.* "He that cometh from heaven is above all"). The question suggests itself whether in other places, where our Lord speaks in the first person, the force of the words attributed to Him lies rather in the confirmatory experience of their truth than in the accuracy of the report. The force of this suggestion comes out if changes are made, as regards the speaker, from the first person to the third; as regards the hearers, from the third person to the first; changes, too, in the tenses of the verbs. For instance: "These things he spake unto us while yet abiding with us. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sent in his name, he teaches us all things, and brings to our remembrance all that he said unto us. Peace he left with us; his peace he gives unto us; not as the world giveth does he give. Let not our heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful. We heard how he said to us, I go away and I come unto you. If we love him, we should rejoice, because he has gone unto the Father . . ." (xiv. 25-28). Or: "He is the true vine and his Father is the husbandman. Every branch in him that beareth not fruit he taketh it away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it that it may bear more fruit.

. . . Let us abide in him and he in us. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so neither can we, except we abide in him . . . for apart from him we can do nothing" (xv. 1-5). Or: "Verily he said unto us that we should weep and lament, but the world would rejoice; that we should be sorrowful, but that our sorrow would be turned into joy. . . . We therefore did have sorrow: but we saw him again, and our heart rejoiced, and our joy no one taketh from us" (xvi. 20).

New meaning and force seem to come into the familiar words if read this way. They witness not only to what Christ said in the past, but to what He is in the present. If so they illustrate the truth that the Fourth Gospel constitutes a bridge where one is greatly needed, namely between the inward Christ of present experience in the Pauline Epistles ("Not I, but Christ liveth in me" . . . "In Christ," etc.) and the external figure of Jesus of Nazareth in the Synoptic Gospels. The fusion then of confirmatory, corroboratory testimony and experience with the report of the spoken word is not just to be regretted. It has its value and its contribution to make. We become the more sure that Jesus did substantially say this and that, just because what He said has been fulfilled.

On the other hand the recognition of the fusion of human testimony with divine word, makes it legitimate to attribute to the human mediating element this or that which we should reluctantly attribute to our Lord. It would be a relief, for

instance, to believe that Jesus never really said: "All that came before me were thieves and robbers" (x. 8). The same is true of some of the rasping harshness of Jesus in His controversy with "the Jews." It is a relief to suppose that fused with the report of His words are elements of bitterness engendered by the prolonged conflict of the early Church with Judaism. Again, it is a relief to suppose that the author's theological interest—or his jealousy for the divine self-sufficiency of Jesus—led him to represent our Lord as disclaiming that the voice out of heaven came for His sake (xii. 30). For here a note of real discord with the Synoptic picture of Christ in Gethsemane, in veriest need of the Father, seems to be struck. In other cases there are and will be a great variety of verdicts—differing discrimination between spoken word and human or ecclesiastical testimony. This is specially the case with the great discourse on the Bread of Life (chapter vi.). How much is the report of what the Lord said? How much is the translation into words of early Church practice?

As regards all this I do not doubt that the greatly preponderating thing is the value of the testimony or experience being added to the historical witness. For, as has been said, it helps us the better to believe in the Holy Spirit. He *did* "take of the things of Christ" and show them unto them. It took time for the gift of God in Christ to be apprehended. It entailed a process of appreciation—"line upon line, precept upon

precept." Here the Fourth Gospel is greatly fortifying, and in two ways.

First, we owe to it the realization how the first crude expectation of the second coming of Christ was modified in New Testament times. At first "the Kingdom" and "eternal life" lay in the future, as to be waited for at "the Coming." The Johannine writings illustrate the process, already referred to, whereby it was realized that the Kingdom is a present possession as well as a future hope; that eternal life is here and not only beyond. "This *is* life eternal that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John xvii. 3): another instance of the interjection of commentary into report (cf. also 1 John v. 20): "We know him that is true and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

But it would be a great mistake to suppose that this deeper apprehension of the gift of God in His Son meant the extinction of expectation about the coming. The old note rings out to the end—indeed it always will. "Little children, it is the last hour." It is integral to the Johannine message not only to see judgment (or testing) at work in the present, but to await the coming of the final and consummating judgment.

Secondly, the Fourth Gospel, by its inclusion of the testimony of experience, illustrates grandly the way in which our Lord was found to be the fulfilment and satisfaction of human need. The

Johannine writings carry further the great testimony of the Epistle to the Ephesians to the "summing up of all things in Christ" (Eph. i. 10) —to Christus Consummator. They are full of the verified certainty that the aspiration of philosophy after divine self-expression, the yearnings of souls for life, light, love, redemption—that the need of the world has been met by Him who is God Incarnate; who is Light, and Life, and Love; who is Saviour and Deliverer.

Yet, once more, the more emphasis is laid on the value of the testimony of experience which the Johannine writings show, the more will the question press for answer: Whose experience? No doubt the answer partly is "The Church's." But, as we have seen, the personal factor is of insistent importance. And there is this further consideration, which adds, if possible, to its importance. It is that our Lord committed Himself to the process of being witnessed to, mediated by men. He left no writing, only a witnessing body. There are, therefore, in the absolute nature of the case, other men who come between our Lord and the successive generations. Who, then, is he who in the Fourth Gospel stands between us and Him? Whose is the mediating memory, witness, experience, personality? I think that we should count it a wonderful gift of God that in coming to the author of the Fourth Gospel we are brought into the greatest closeness to his Master. For we are brought to "the disciple whom he loved."

It is by so reading and understanding (at any rate in some degree) this book that we can accept, and perhaps reiterate the testimony, which was added by an unknown hand to the chapter which forms an appendix to the book: "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true" (xxi. 24).

CHAPTER XV

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is the supreme instance of Apocalyptic literature. In order to understand it at all—and no one can understand very much of it—that must be borne in mind. Apocalypse, as we saw, means an unveiling, in vision and symbol and picture, of the future and the unseen. Apocalypse was that to which the soul of the few turned in order to nourish hope, under the pressure of the evil times in the centuries immediately before the coming of Christ. It was the product of disappointment at the non-fulfilment of the national hopes which had fed on prophetic promises. So it was to the same quarter that some Christian, of deep poetic inspiration, turned in order to find material with which to compile a message of encouragement to the persecuted Church of Christ.

There is, despite the great difficulty of interpreting its imagery, deep and abiding truth in the Apocalyptic outlook. It is the expression of an incurable faith in the consummation of the purposes of God and in His final victory. If He does not prevail in one way, then He will in another; if not by progressive development and

historical processes, then by catastrophe; if not at the old Jerusalem on earth, then in a New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Further, it represents the true complement to a merely this-worldly view of existence. It sets this life, whether of mankind as a whole or of individual men, as temporary and preparatory, against the background of eternity. It sees that this life has more in it than smooth development and normal business. For this life is also the scene of the arrival of hours of crisis and catastrophe—hours of testing and of judgment at which the claims of the other-world break in and interrupt the even tenor of ordinary days. Our Lord's parable of the foolish rich man, planning to eat, drink and be merry, and thus overtaken by the sudden catastrophic hour at which his soul is required of him, is the perfect illustration here.

The Book of Revelation richly illustrates these general truths. But it is in detail exceedingly difficult to appraise and to interpret. It is of all books in the Bible the one about which it is most fatally erroneous to read in a literalistic spirit. For it is a book of poetry, of symbol and of imagery of which the literal interpretation makes little but nonsense. Further, the imagery is largely derived from the Old Testament and from the mass of Apocalyptic literature outside the Old Testament. The material therefore of the book is largely pre-Christian in origin, and it cannot be said that it is fully modified by the Christian standpoint of the writer. He, too, is writing

under the bitter provocation of savage persecution. He draws upon the expressions of hate and vindictiveness which were framed by Jewish minds in previous days of similar suffering. He has at his hand a dread armoury of weapons from which to furnish the Church militant. There is need, therefore, to beware of accepting literally and uncritically all that is contained in the book.

There is need also of warning against the kind of literalism which seeks to find in the book a prophecy of the future history of the world. Our times have seen a recrudescence of this endeavour to twist both the book and history into fantastic agreement. As regards the relationship of the book to history, the truth to bear in mind is that its writer was using Apocalyptic vision and imagery with which to interpret the times in which he and his fellow-Christians lived. The book is a message for the immediate present, not a forecast of the remote future. It conveys the assurance of God's speedy intervention to overthrow the enemies of the early Church.

A scholar thus summarizes the position: "Persecution has broken out on all sides. The writer himself has been exiled at Patmos. Though the name of only one martyr (Antipas) is given (ii. 13), there is every indication that martyrdoms were of frequent occurrence. At the opening of the fifth seal, for instance, the writer sees "underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held" (vi. 9). A systematic attempt

was being made to establish Cæsar-worship on an extensive scale. An edict was issued that "as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (xiii. 15). The devotees of the cult of Cæsar wore a special mark on "their right hand or upon their forehead," and all who had not received the mark of the beast, as it was called, were boycotted in the markets and ostracized in social life. This clash between Christianity and Cæsar-worship entailed untold sufferings upon the followers of Christ." [1] This was the position which an unknown prophet felt constrained by the Spirit of God to confront. It belongs, it is generally supposed, to the reign of Domitian, A.D. 81–96. For, as Dr Moffatt says, no worship of the Emperor which is adequate to the data of the Apocalypse was enforced till Domitian's reign.

Nothing is agreed upon by scholars about the authorship of the book except that the writer is not the man who wrote the Fourth Gospel. And if the writer of the latter be St John the Apostle, then it is agreed that the author of the Apocalypse is not St John. "The style, the contents, and the theological outlook of the two books are diametrically opposed to each other." [2]

But the message of the prophet or seer is not diminished in value by his identity being unknown. The scholar already quoted summarizes the message of his book thus: "The writer had

[1] Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 926.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 927.

inherited from the past three great ideas : (*a*) Like all Christians of the time he believed in the near return of Christ ; (*b*) like all Apocalyptic writers he held that before the end God would intervene in human history to vindicate truth and righteousness and save His people from their foes ; (*c*) this interpretation would mean a day of judgment for the world, the destruction of Antichrist, and the establishment of a kingdom of saints. In the Book of Revelation these three great ideas are applied to the crisis which confronted the Church in the first century. The prospect seemed so hopeless that no human way of escape seemed possible. Faith, therefore, demanded that God should act, and in the first century divine action could only follow the lines which had been laid down in Apocalyptic literature. The Book of Revelation is right in assuming that God must come to the rescue of His people ; it is wrong only when it attempts to describe the mode in which the deliverance must arrive. Its lurid pictures of the outpouring of God's wrath were not realized, but its promise of divine succour and help for the stricken Church was abundantly fulfilled." [1]

Yet there is much more to be said than this. There is much in the book which applies to the ever-continued warfare of the Church down the ages. An Apocalyptic " tract for the times " is found to contain a message for all times. For there is a timelessness about the deep things of the Spirit. What therefore came home to a soul

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 926.

full of a passionate devotion to Christ, and suffering with the Church in days of persecution, comes home afresh to kindred souls at other times. Our generation had known something of this. During the catastrophic days of the Great War, this book seemed to acquire new and deeper meaning.

Once again, then, a Biblical document proves to be much more than a literary phenomenon. Behind the writing lies the experience of men in contact with the living God. Therefore, through the maze of obscure and fantastic imagery, the reader of the book, who hath an ear, can still "hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches." The message "unto Ephesus and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea," is a message for all time. The book, indeed, though clearly in no little measure a compilation of earlier literary material, is true to its name. It is a revelation of God. There shines through it, sometimes darkly and obscurely, sometimes with strange radiance, the light—the tremendous light of God, in all the mystery of His beauty and holiness and love. In no other book in the world is there so much of the "Tremendum Mysterium" of the Godhead. When literary analysis has done its work and has traced the imagery and symbolism of the book to various origins, there remains a wealth of spiritual meaning which compels us by its inexpressible depth to speak of it as inspired. It is more than a "natural" book composed by

man; it is also supernatural. It is more than human; it is divine.

This appears in many passages which have spoken home, with the power of that which is ineffable, to the soul of the Church. They have been taken up into the Church's treasuries of worship. They have in them music and poetry which will never die; a depth of divine mystery which will never be exhausted.

This appears in the initial vision of the Lord in glory. "I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white, as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (i. 12-18). The same is true of the promises in the messages to the Churches. For instance: "To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree

of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (ii. 7). "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (ii. 10). "He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name" (iii. 12). "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (iii. 20).

There are also the great Choruses of praise, vibrating with awe and adoration, which occur throughout the book. There is the Chorus of Creation: "Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power; for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created" (iv. 11). Or the Chorus of Redemption, which expresses with so deep a penetration the central paradox of Christian theology, namely that the victory of God is not that of irresistible power but is that of omnipotent love. For He who proved worthy to open the book of life's riddle—the book which "no one in heaven or on earth . . . was able to open . . . or to look thereon"—is not a mighty potentate, but a victorious lover. As has been finely said, "Where the Seer looked to see a lion—the Lion of Judah who had overcome to open the book—he saw a Lamb as it had been slain. Where he looked to see power and force,

he saw love and gentleness." Therefore "They sing a new song saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth. And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every created thing which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, heard I saying, Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the domination, for ever and ever" (v. 9-13).

There is the Chorus of Victory: "The Kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, which art and which wast; because thou hast taken thy great power and didst reign" (xi. 15-17).

And the Chorus of the Redeemed, known only to them: "And I saw, and behold, the Lamb

standing on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps; and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth" (xiv. 1-3).

And there is the Chorus of the Marriage of the Lamb: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (xix. 6-9).

There are also the words which breathe peace and encouragement and future hope to those who suffer for Christ's sake: "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These which are arrayed in the white robes, who are they and whence

came they? And I said unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. . . . And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them" (vii. 13-17; xiv. 13).

The book ends with the immortal vision of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (xxi. 2). And in that vision is summed up, in a fashion which reveals how much the reality transcends all expression of it, the great drama of life to which the whole of the Bible witnesses. In and through the thick throng of history the divine purpose pursues its way. God fulfils His Will, man achieves his destiny. Here fitly and inevitably this *Biblical Thoroughfare* stops—at, so to say—the last sign-post, which

points onward toward the end of man's pilgrimage and the consummation of all things in God.

"And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there): and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it: and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall do him service: and they shall see his face: and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be night no more: and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (xxi. 23 to xxii. 5).

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

Cancelled from
Gladstone's Library
24 APR 2023
GLADSTONE'S

BOOKS FROM OUR LIST

Experience of God. A brief Enquiry into the Grounds of Christian Conviction.

By HERBERT H. FARMER, M.A., Minister of the Presbyterian Church, New Barnet. Author of *Things not Seen.* 5s. net.

The Faith that Rebels. A Re-examination of the Miracles of Jesus.

By D. S. CAIRNS, D.D. Author of *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith.* Second Edition. 8s. 6d. net.

"The book marks the beginning of a new epoch in Christian thinking and is of quite exceptional importance."—*The Friend.*

"At last we have a book on miracles which really moves the problem out of the stalemate into which it had fallen."—*The Guardian.*

The Making of Modern English Religion. An Historical Impression of certain Religious Forces in modern English History.

By BERNARD L. MANNING, Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. 3s. 6d. net.

Contents: The Wasting of the Mediæval Legacy: Institutions—Beliefs; Martin Luther and the Re-discovery of Evangelical Religion; John Calvin and the Re-statement of Churchmanship; The Free Churches; The Anglican Church; The Historical Approach to Ecclesiastical Problems.

The Coming of the Church

By JOHN R. COATES, M.A., Professor of Old Testament, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. Author of *Men of Destiny*, *The Christ of Revolution*, etc. 3s. net.

This book discusses the essential nature and function of the Christian Church and sets the historic achievement of Jesus in a new light.

STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT PUBLICATIONS

STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

Personality and Progress

By HENRY T. HODGKIN, M.B. Author of *The Way of Jesus*, etc. 4s. 6d. net.

"There are many to-day who are dreaming dreams of the new world, but they expect to get their new epochs by short cuts, or by quick panaceas. This book holds out no such hope . . . It counts, not on magic, but on slow processes of education and on life-forces that gradually lift to new levels. . . . The hopes here raised spring out of deep and vital realities that have been searched out and sounded."—*From the Foreword.*

The Necessity of the Second Coming

By HUGH MARTIN, M.A. Author of *Christ and Money*, *The Kingdom without Frontiers*, etc. 1s. net.

"Mr Martin is a thoughtful and reverent writer and his book is worth serious consideration."—*The Church Times.*

Sacraments.

A Study of some Moments in the attempt to define their Meaning for Christian Worship.

By A. L. LILLEY, Canon Residentiary, Chancellor and Praelector of Hereford. 4s. net; paper, 2s. 6d. net.

Contents: Religion and Theology; St Augustine; Hugh and Richard of St Victor; St Thomas Aquinas; Later Scholastic Discussions; The Doctrine of Transubstantiation.

A book of special interest and relevance in view of current discussion.

The Christian's Alternative to War.

An Examination of Christian Pacifism.

By LEYTON RICHARDS, Minister of Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham. 4s. net; paper, 2s. 6d. net.

32 RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON, W.C. 1

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN

ST. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY
HAWARDEN